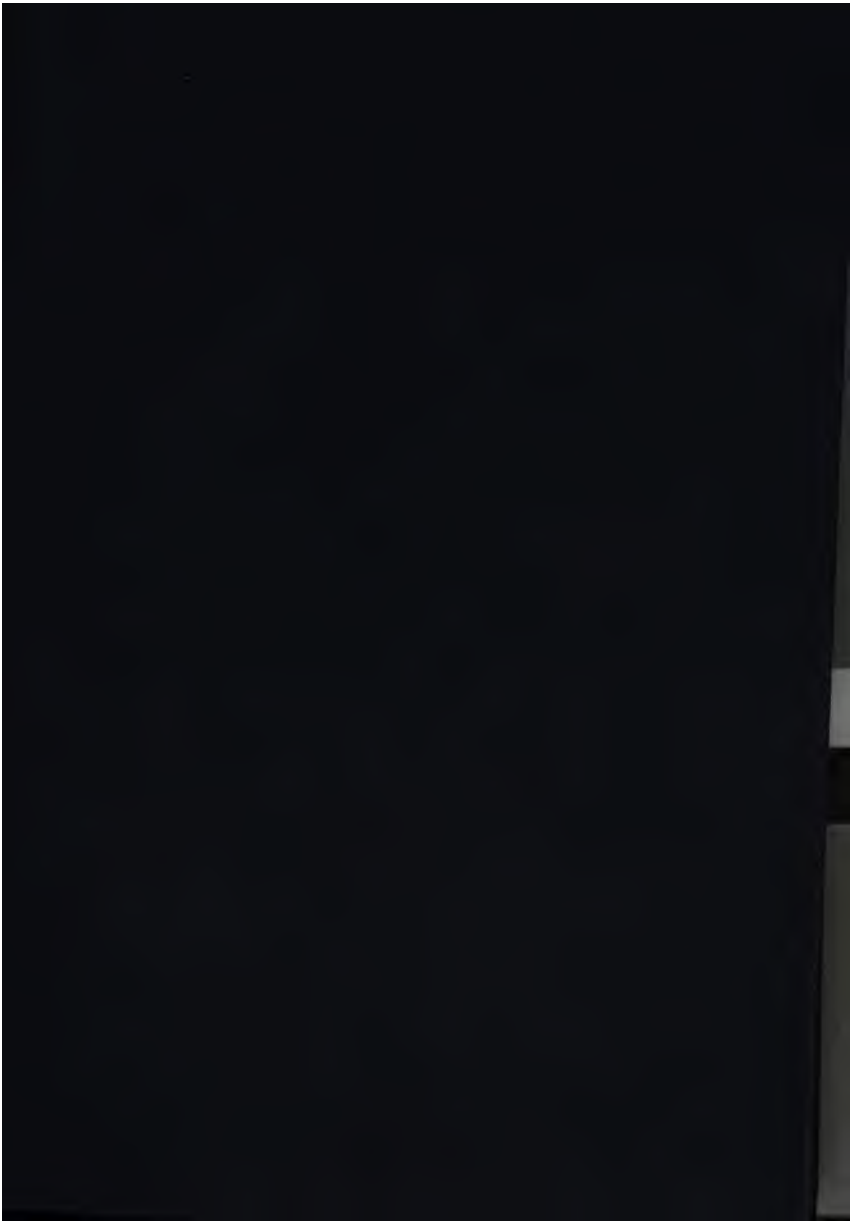

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OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3064.

THE MAN WHO WAS GOOD.

BY

LEONARD MERRICK.

IN ONE VOLUME.

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o

THE MAN WHO WAS GOOD

A NOVEL

BY

LEONARD MERRICK,

AUTHOR OF

"VIOLET MOSES," "MR. BAZALGETTE'S AGENT," ETC.

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1895.

"That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you."

James Lee's Wife.

THE MAN WHO WAS GOOD.

CHAPTER I.

THERE were three women in the dressing-room. Little Miss Macy, who played an ensign, was pulling her uniform off, and the "Duchess"—divested of velvet—stood brushing the powder out of her hair. The third woman was doing nothing. In a chair by the travelling-basket labelled "Miss Olive Westland's Tour: 'The Foibles of Fashion' Co.," she sat regarding the others, her gloved hands lying idle in her lap. She was scarcely what is termed "beautiful," much less was she what ought to be called "pretty"; perhaps "womanly" came nearer to suggesting her than either. Her eyes were not large, but they were so pensive; her mouth was not small, but it curved so tenderly; the face was not regular, but it looked so deliciously soft. Somebody had once said it always made him feel the utter hopelessness of trying to conceive humanity's features arranged on any other plan than the one God drew for them. And if the same might be said of every face, it was the more natural that it had been said of hers. It seemed, in watching her, such a perfect thing there

should be a low white brow, and hair to shade it; it seemed such an excellent and inevitable thing there should be lips just where the Maker put lips, and a chin just where the chin is modelled. Her age might have been twenty-seven, also it might have been thirty. The wise man does not question the nice woman's age, he just thanks Heaven she lives; and she in the chair by the basket was decidedly nice. Other women said so.

"Have you been 'in front,' Mrs. Carew?" asked the "Duchess."

She answered that she had.

"I came round at the end. It was a very good house; the business is improving."

"I should think," remarked the ensign, reaching for her skirt, "you ought to know every line of the piece, the times you've seen it! But, of course, you've nothing else to do."

"No," Mrs. Carew assented; "it isn't lively sitting alone all the evening in lodgings. And it's more comfortable in the circle than 'behind.' How you people manage to get dressed in some of the theatres puzzles me; I look at you from the front, remembering where your things were put on, and marvel. If I were in the profession, my salary wouldn't keep me in the frocks I ruined."

"I wonder Carew hasn't ever wanted you to enter it."

The nice woman laughed.

"Enter the profession!" she exclaimed—"I? Good gracious! what an idea! No; Tony has a very flattering opinion of his wife's abilities, but I don't think even he goes the length of fancying I could act."

"You'd be as good as a certain leading lady we

know of, at any rate. Nobody could be much worse than our respected manageress, I'll take my oath!"

"Jeannie," said the "Duchess" sharply, "don't quarrel with your bread-and-butter!"

"I'm not," retorted the girl; "I'm criticising it—a very different matter, my dear. I hate these amateurs with money, even if they do take out companies and give 'shops' to us 'pros.' She 'queers' the best line I've got in the piece every night because she won't speak up, and nobody knows what on earth I'm supposed to be answering. The real type of the 'confidential actress' is Miss Westland; no danger of *her* allowing anyone in the audience to overhear what she says."

"Tony believes she'll get on all right," observed Mrs. Carew, "when she has had more experience. You do, too, don't you, Mrs. Bowman?"

The "Duchess" replied vaguely that experience did a great deal. She had profited by her own, and at the "aristocratic mother" period of her career no longer canvassed in dressing-rooms the capabilities of the powers that paid the treasury.

"Get on!" echoed Jeannie Macy, struggling into her jacket, "of course she'll get on; she has means. She'll do the watering-places in the autumn, and, if it's very much she's got, you'll see her by-and-by with a theatre of her own in town. Money, influence, or talent, you must have one of the three in the profession, and for a short-cut give me either of the first two. Sweet dreams, both of you; I've got a hot supper waiting for me, and I can smell it spoiling from here!" The door banged behind her, and Mrs. Carew turned to the "Duchess" with a smile.

"You are coming round to us afterwards, aren't you?" she said.

"Yes, Carew asked the husband in the morning: I hope he's got some coppers. I reminded him. It's such a bother having to keep an account of how we stand after every deal. We'll be round about half-past twelve. Are you going?"

"Tony ought to be ready by now, I should say; I'm going to knock and hurry him up, anyhow. You remember our number?"

"Nine?"

"Nine; opposite the baker's."

Mrs. Carew hummed a little tune, and made her way down the stairs. The stage, of which she had a passing view, was dark, for the footlights were out, and in the T-piece only one gas-jet flared bluely between the bare expanse of boards and the blackness of the empty auditorium. In the passage, a man, hastening from the star-room, almost ran against her, and she saw it was the one she sought. Mr. Seaton Carew still wore the clothes in which he finished the play, and the make-up had not been removed from his face.

"What!" she cried, "not 'changed'? How's that? what have you been doing?"

"I've been talking to Miss Westland," he explained hurriedly. "There was something she wanted to see me about. Don't wait any longer, Mary; I've got to go up to her lodgings with her."

She hesitated a moment, surprised.

"Is it so important?" she asked.

"Yes," he said; "I'll tell you about it later. I want to have a talk with you afterwards: I shan't be long."

Whenever she came to the theatre, which was four or five times a week, they always returned together, and the exception was not pleasant to her. She enjoyed the stroll in the fresh air "after the show" with Tony. Three years' familiarity with the custom had not destroyed its early charm to her, and to-night she went out into the Leicester streets a shade disconsolately. The gas was already lighted when she reached the house, and a fire—for the month was March—burnt clearly in the grate. The accommodation was not extensive: a small ground-floor parlour, and a bedroom at the back. On the sitting-room mantelpiece some faded photographs of people who had stayed there—Mr. Delancey as "The Silver King"; Miss Ida Ryan, smoking a cigarette, as "Sam Willoughby"—contributed toward a certain professional air which makes all the apartments supported by the actor on tour so curiously alike. She took off her cloak, and, turning her back on the supper-table, wondered what the conference with Miss Westland was about. A woman is never alone where there is a fire, and she got through half an hour passably well; but after that the tedium of the delay began to tell upon her. The landlady had brought in her book of references during the afternoon, with the request that Mr. and Mrs. Carew would accord her theirs; and fetching it from where it lay, she began to turn the leaves, listlessly reading the scribbled testimonials. These inevitable reference-books were Tony's special aversion, for he vowed he never knew what to write, and, perusing the comments contained in this one, she mentally agreed with him that it was not easy to find a medium between curtness and exaggeration.

Some she recognised, knowing what signatures were appended before she looked. The "Stay but a little, I will come again" quotation she had encountered above the same name in a score of lodgings, and two or three "impromptus" in rhyme she likewise remembered to have met before.

She had been very happy this time in Leicester. They had arrived on the anniversary of her and Tony's first meeting, and she had felt additionally tender towards him all the week. Mrs. Liddy, who let the rooms, had not effected the happiness certainly, but her lodger was quite willing to give her some of the benefit of it, womanlike. She dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote in a bold, upright hand, "The week spent in Mrs. Liddy's apartments will always be a pleasant recollection to Mr. and Mrs. Seaton Carew." Then she put the date underneath.

She had just finished when Mrs. Liddy entered with the beer. The Irishwoman said she was going to bed, but Mrs. Carew would find more glasses in the cupboard when her friends came, and she supposed that was all. Gas and coals are rarely matters of dispute in theatrical lodgings, and Mrs. Liddy retired to rest with her heart unharassed, though they might burn till sunrise.

It was now twelve o'clock, and Mrs. Carew, with an occasional glance at the cold beef and corner of rice pudding, began to walk about the room. Presently she stopped in her perambulations among the shiny furniture, and listened. A whistle had reached her from the outside, the *dee di-dum di-da di-didy,* which is the call of the English-speaking Thespian all over the world. She

knew who that must be—young Dolliver, the third of their expected guests, who had forgotten their number, as he invariably did in every city they visited. She drew aside the blind, and allowed the light to shine out through the glass. Young Dolliver it was.

"I've been whistling all up and down the road," he said, in an aggrieved manner when she had let him in; "what were you doing?"

"Well, that isn't bad," she laughed. "Why don't you remember addresses like anybody else?"

"Can't," he declared; "never could. Never know where I'm staying myself if I don't make a note of it as soon as I engage the place. In Jarrow, one Monday, I had to wander all over the town for three mortal hours in the pouring rain, looking for some one belonging to the company to tell me where I lived. Hallo! where's Carew?"

"He'll be in directly," she said; "sit down."

"Oh! I'm awfully sorry to have come so early," he exclaimed; "you haven't 'fed,' or anything."

He was a bright-faced boy, with a cheery flow of chatter that made dulness impossible, and she was glad he had appeared.

"I expect the Bowmans any minute," she assured him; "you aren't early. Do sit down, there's a good child, and don't stand fiddling your hat about; there, put it on the piano! Have you banqueted yourself?"

"To repletion. What did you think of Carew's notice in the Great Sixpennyworth on Saturday? Wasn't it swagger? 'The *rôle* finds an ideal exponent in Mr. Seaton Carew, an actor who is rapidly making his way into the foremost ranks of his profession!'"

"A line and a half," she said, "by a provincial correspondent! I shan't be satisfied till——well!"

"I know—till you see him with sixteen lines all to himself in the *Telegraph*. No more will he, I fancy. He's red-hot on success, is Carew—do anything for it. So'm I; I should like to play Claude."

"Claude!" she echoed. "Why, you're funny!"

"Not by disposition," he averred. "Miss Westland is responsible for my being funny. When they said 'a small comedy-part is still vacant,' I said small comedy-parts are my forte of fortes! Had it been an 'old man' that was wanted, I should have professed myself born to dodder. But if it comes to choice—to the secret tendency of the sacred fire—I am 'lead,' I am romantic, I have centre-entrances in the limelight! Look here: 'A deep vale, shut out by Alpine——' No, wait a minute; you do the Langtry-business, and let the flowers fall, while I 'paint the home.' Do you know, my private opinion is that Claude only took those lessons to save the widow any outlay for doing up the home! Haven't got any flowers? Anything else then—where are the cards?"

He found the pack on the sideboard, and pushed a few into her hand.

"These'll do for the flowers," he said; "finger 'em lovingly; think you're holding a good nap."

"Don't be so ridiculous!" she exclaimed.

"I'm not," responded Dolliver, with dignity; "I really want to hear your views on my reading. Where was I—er—er——

"'Near a clear lake margin'd by fruits of gold
And whispering myrtles; glassing softest skies
As cloudless, save with rare and roseate shadows . . .
As I would have thy fate."

You see I make a pause after 'shadows,' seeking a simile. I gaze in momentary hesitation at the floats, and the borders, and a kid in the pit. Then I encounter the eyes of the fair Pauline, and conclude with 'As I would have thy fate,' smiling dreamily at the excellence of my own conceit. That's a new point, I take it?"

He was quite enamoured of his "new point," and was still expatiating on its beauty, when they heard Carew unlocking the street-door.

It was a man much of the woman's own age who came in. His face was clean-shaven, and his hair worn a trifle longer than the autocrat of the barber-shop permits it to remain on the heads of the young gentlemen who defer to his taste. Now that he was seen in a good light, it was plain he was disturbed; but he shook Dolliver by the hand as if he were relieved to find him there.

"What, not had supper? You must be starving, Mary!"

"I am pretty hungry," she admitted; "aren't you?"

"Well, I've had something—still, I'll come to the table." She had looked disappointed, and he drew his chair up. "Dolliver?"

"Nothing for me, thanks. Oh! a glass of beer—I don't object to that."

Mary, despite her assertion that she was hungry, made no great progress with her supper, and Seaton's

evident disquietude even damped the garrulity of the boy. It was not until the Bowmans arrived, and a game of napoleon had been commenced, that the faint restraint caused by his manner wore away.

Mr. Bowman, mindful of his wife's injunction, had obtained several shillings' worth of coppers, and, profiting by his forethought, each of the party began with a rouleau of pence. These occasional reunions in somebody or another's lodgings after the performance had become quite an institution in "The Foibles of Fashion" Company, and it was seldom that anyone found them expensive. Mary's entire capital, coppers included, was half a sovereign, and to have won or lost such a sum as that at a sitting would have been the subject of allusion for a month. To-night, however, the luck was curiously unequal, and, to the surprise of all, Dolliver found himself losing seven shillings before they had been playing half an hour. Much sympathy was expressed for Dolliver.

"Never mind, dear boy; it's always a mistake to win at the start," observed Carew. "There's plenty of time. I pass!"

"Pass," said the "Duchess."

Mary called three, and made them.

"How do you stand, Mrs. Carew?" asked Bowman.

"I'm just about the same as when we began," said she.—"Tony, Mr. Bowman has nothing to drink.—Oh, what a shame, Dolliver!—thanks! Fill up your own, won't you?—He's a perfect martyr, this boy," she added; "he cleared the table before you two people came in—didn't you?"

"Four!" cried Dolliver. "Yes; I cleared it beautifully; 'utility' is my line of business."

"Since when? I thought just now——"

"Oh, confidences, Mrs. Carew!" He turned scarlet. "Don't give me away! . . . Now, Mrs. Bowman, which is it to be?"

She played trumps, and led with a king.

A breathless moment, crowned by an unsuspected "little one" from Dolliver. His "four" were safe, and he leant back radiant.

The "Duchess" prepared to deal.

"Who's got an address for the next town?" she inquired.

"Haven't you written yet?"

"No, we haven't got a place to write to; hateful, isn't it? If there's a thing I abominate, it's having to roam about looking for rooms after one gets in. We've —pass—always stayed in the same house, and—everybody to put in the kitty again—and now the woman's left, or something. My! isn't the kitty getting big! Look at all those sixpences underneath; somebody count it."

"Now then, Carew, don't go to sleep!"

Carew, thus adjured, gathered up the cards. He was fitfully almost himself again, and only Mary was really sure that anything was amiss.

"There's a little hotel I've stopped at there," he said. "Not at all bad—they find you everything for twenty-five bob the week; for two people there'd be a reduction, too. Remind me, and I'll give you the name of it; I have it in my book.—Bowman, you to call!"

Bowman called nothing; everybody passed again, and the kitty was further augmented.

"What time do we travel Sunday—anybody know?"

"You can be precious sure," said Bowman, "that it will be at some unearthly hour. I've had a good many years' experience in the profession, but I never in my life was in a company where they did so many night journeys as they do in this. I believe that little outsider arranges it on purpose!"

"A 'daisy' of an acting-manager, isn't he? I once knew another fellow much the—two, I call two—and then, at the end of the tour, hanged if they didn't rush us for a presentation to him!"

"So they will for this chap. Presentations in the profession, upon my soul, are the——"

"Three!" said the "Duchess."

"And when the time comes, not a member of the crowd will have the pluck to refuse his half-'skiv', you see!"

"Did you ever know an actor who had, when he was asked for one?"

Dolliver flushed excitedly.

"Nap!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, oh, oh! Dolliver goes nap!"

"No; d'ye mean it? Very well, fire ahead, then; play up!"

There was two minutes' silence, and the youngster smacked down his last card, preparing a smile for defeat.

"He's made it! Mrs. Bowman, you threw it away; if you'd played hearts, instead——"

"No, no, she couldn't help it. She had to follow suit."

"Of course!"—the "Duchess" caught feebly at the explanation—"I had to follow suit. What a haul! good gracious!"

"That puts you right again, eh, dear boy?"

"'I am once more the great house of Lyons!'" remarked Dolliver, piling up the pennies. "Six, seven, eight! Look at the silver, great Scot! Mrs. Carew, there's the ninepence I owe you."

"'I have paid this woman, and I owe her nothing,'" quoted Seaton. "Dolliver, you've ruined me, you beggar! Where's the 'bacca?"

At something to three there was a murmur about it being late, but the loser now was Mrs. Bowman, and, her shillings having drifted into the possession of Mary, the hostess said it really was not late at all. This disposed of the breaking-up question for half an hour. Then Bowman began to talk of concluding the game after a couple of rounds. No game ever yet was concluded after the number of rounds originally decided on, and when two of these arrangements had been set at nought, the "Duchess" proposed that they should finish at the next "nap." To "finish at the next nap" is a euphemism for continuing a good long while, and the resolution was carried unanimously.

The clock had struck four when the nap was made, and the winner was Mary. She had won upwards of six shillings, and the "Duchess," who was the poorer by it, smiled with sleepy resignation.

"You had the luck, after all, Mrs. Carew," laughed Dolliver. "Good-night."

"Yes," she said carelessly; "I've made something between me and the workhouse, anyhow. Good-night."

She loitered about the room, putting little aimless touches to things about, while Carew saw the trio to the door. She heard him shut it behind them, and heard their steps growing fainter on the pavement. He was slow returning, queerly slow. Dolliver's voice reached her, separating from the Bowmans at the corner, and still he had not come in.

"Tony!" she called.

He rejoined her almost as she spoke.

"Don't go to bed, Mary," he said huskily; "I've something to say to you."

"What is it?" she asked.

He hesitated an instant, seeking an introductory phrase. The agitation he had been fighting all the night had conquered him.

"My release has come at last," he answered. "My wife is dead."

"Dead!"

She stood gazing at him with dilated eyes, the colour ebbing from her cheeks.

"She was ill some time; drink it was, I hear—I dare say. Anyhow, she's gone; the mistake is finished. I've paid for it dearly enough, Lord knows!"

He had paused midway between her and the hearth, and he moved to the hearth. She was sensible of a vague pang as he did so. A tense silence followed his words. In thoughts she had been unable to escape, the woman who had paid for his mistake more dearly still had sometimes imagined such a moment as this—had sometimes foreseen him crying to her that he was free. Perhaps, now that the moment was here, it was

a little wanting—a little barer than the declaration of freedom she had pictured.

"One cannot but feel it a great shock," she said at length, half inaudibly. "It is always a shock, the news of death." But she felt the burden of speech should be assumed by him. "Were you—used you to be very fond of her? Does it come back?"

"I was twenty. 'Fond'? I don't know. I wasn't with her three months, when—— She had walked Liverpool. I never saw her from the day I found it out. She didn't want me; the money was enough for her—to be sure of it every week."

His attitude remained unchanged, his hands thrust deep into his trouser-pockets. Opposite each other they both reviewed the past. She waited for him to come to her—to touch her. Yes, the reality was barer than the picture she had seen.

"When was it?" she murmured.

"It was some weeks ago."

"So long!"

He left the hearth moodily, and commenced to pace the room from end to end. The woman did not stir. The memory was with her of the morning he had avowed this marriage—of the agony that had wept to her for pity—of the clasp that would not let her go. She looked abstractedly at the fire his withdrawal had exposed; but in her heart she saw his every step, and counted the turns that kept him from her side.

"It makes a great difference!" he said abruptly.

The consciousness of the difference was flooding her reason, yet she did not speak. It should not be by herself the sanctification of her sacrifice was broached.

The wish, the reminder, the reparation, all should be his. She nodded assent.

"A great difference," he repeated hoarsely. He smeared the dampness from his mouth and chin. "If —if my reputation were made now, Mary, I should ask you to be my wife."

And then she did not speak. There was an instant in which the wall swam before her in a haze, and the floor lurched. In the next, she was still fronting the fireplace; she was staring at it with the old intentness of regard; and his voice was sounding again, though she heard it dully:

"—while a poor one cannot choose. I would—I would ask you to marry me. I know what you've been to me—I don't forget—I know very well. But, as it is, it would be madness—it would be putting a rope round my own neck! I want you to hear how I'm situated. I want you to listen to the circumstances——"

"You will not make amends?"

"I tell you I'm not my own master."

"You tell me that we have to part! We cannot remain together any longer unless I am your wife."

"We cannot remain together any longer at all; that is what I'm coming to." He went back to the mantelpiece, and leant his elbows on it, kicking the half-hot coals. "I am going to marry Miss Westland!"

He had said it; the echo of the utterance sung in his ears. Behind him her figure was motionless—its stillness frightened him. Intensified by the riotous ticking of the clock, in which his pulses were strained

through their throbbing for the relief of a rustle, a breath, the pause grew unendurable.

"For God's sake, why don't you say something!" he exclaimed. He faced her impetuously, and they looked at each other across the table. "Mary, it is my chance in life! She cares for me, don't you see. You think me a scoundrel—don't you see what a chance it is! What can I come to as I am? With her—she will get on, she has money—I shall rise, I shall be a manager, I shall get to London in time. Mary!"

"You are—going—to marry—Miss Westland?"

"I must," he said.

For the veriest second it was almost as if she were struggling to understand. Then she threw out her hands dizzily, crying out:

"That is what your love was, then—a lie, a shameful lie!"

"It wasn't; no, Mary, it was real! I cared for you—I did; the thing is forced upon me!"

"Cared, when you use your liberty like this! You 'cared'! And I pitied you—you wrung the soul of me with your despair—I forgave you keeping back the tale so long! I came to you to be your wife, and you went down on your knees, and vowed you had not had the courage to tell me before, but your wife was living—some awful woman you couldn't divorce. I gave myself to you, I became the thing you can turn out of doors, all because I loved you, all because I believed in your love for me." She caught at her throat. "You deserved it, did you not?—you justify it now so nobly—the faith that has made me a——"

"Mary!"

"Oh, I can say it," she burst forth hysterically. "I *am,* you know; you have made me one—you and your 'love'! Why shouldn't I say it?"

"I told you the truth; if I had been free at that time——"

"When did you hear the news of the death? Answer me—it wasn't to-night?"

"What is the difference," he muttered, "when I heard?"

"Oh!" she moaned, "go away from me, don't come near me! You coward!"

She sank on to the edge of the sofa, rocking herself to and fro. The man roamed aimlessly around. Once or twice he glanced across at her, but she paid no heed. His pipe was on the side-board; he filled it clumsily, and drew at it in nervous pulls.

He was the first to speak again.

"I know I seem a hound, I know it all looks very bad; but I don't suppose there's a man in five hundred who would refuse such an opportunity, for all that. No, nor one in five thousand, either. You won't see it in an unprejudiced light, of course; but it seems to me —yes, it does, and I can't help saying so—that if you were really as fond of me as you think, if my interests were really dear to you, you would yourself counsel me to leap at the chance, and, what's more, feel honestly glad that a prospect of success had come in my way. You know what it means to me," he went on querulously; "you have been in the profession—at least, as good as in the profession—three years; you know that in the ordinary course of events I should never get any higher than I am, never play in London in my life.

You know I've gone as far as I can ever expect to go without influence to back me, that in ten years' time I should be exactly what I am now, a leading-man for second-rate tours; and that ten years later I should be playing 'heavy fathers,' or Lord knows what, still 'on the road,' and done for—the fire all spent, wasted and worn out in the provinces. That's what it would be; you've heard me say it again and again; and I should go on seeing Miss Somebody's son, and Mr. Somebody-else's daughter, with their parents' names to get them the engagements, playing prominent business in London theatres before they've learnt how to walk across a stage. Miss Westland's a fine-looking girl, and she knows a lot of society people in town; and she has money enough to take some house there when she's lost her amateurishness a bit. Right off I shall be somebody, too; I shall manage the business arrangements. I'll have a column 'ad.' in the *Era* every week: 'For vacant dates apply to Mr. Seaton Carew!' Oh, Mary, it's such a chance, such a lift! . I am fond of you, you know I am; I care more for your little finger than for that woman's body and soul. Don't think me callous; it's damnable I've got to behave so—it takes all the light, all the luck, out of the thing that the way to it is so hard. I wish you could know what I'm feeling."

"I think I do know," she said bitterly—"better than you, perhaps. You are remembering how easily you could have taken the luck if your prayers to me had failed. And you are angered at me in your heart because the shame you feel spoils so much of the pleasure now."

He was humiliated to perceive this was true. Her

words described a mean nature, and his resentment deepened.

"When did you tell Miss Westland?" she faltered.

"Tell her?"

"What I am—that I am not—— When was it?"

"This evening. It won't make any awkwardness for you; I mean, she won't speak of it to any of the others. Nobody will know for——"

"The whole company may know to-morrow!" she answered, drying her eyes. "Seeing that I shall be gone, they may know to-morrow as well as later. Oh, how they will talk, all of them, how they will talk about me—the Bowmans, and that boy, too!"

"You will be gone to-morrow! What do you say?"

"Do you suppose——"

"Mary, there are—I must make some—good heavens! how will you go?—where? Mary, listen: by-and-by, when something is settled, in—in a month or more—I want to arrange to send—I couldn't let you want for money, don't you see!"

"I would not take one penny from you," she said, "not the value of one penny, if I were dying! I would not, as Christ hears me! Our life together is over—I am going away!"

He looked at her aghast.

"Now," he ejaculated, "at once? In the middle of the night?"

"Now at once—in the middle of the night!"

"Be reasonable"—he caught her fingers, and held them in miserable expostulation—"wait till day, at any rate. You are beside yourself; there is nothing to be gained by it. In the morning, if you must——"

"Oh!" she choked, "do you think I would stop here an hour after this? Did you—did you think so? You man! Yes, I should be no worse to *you!* but to *me,* the lowness of it! All in a moment the lowness of it! I have tried to feel that we were married; I always believed it was your trouble that I had to be what I was. If you had ever heard—as soon as it was possible, I thought every minute would have been a burden to you until you had made it all real and right. To stop with you now, the thing I am—despised—on sufferance——"

She dragged her hand away from him and stumbled into the bedroom. There it was quite dark, and, shaking, she groped about for matches and the candle. A small Gladstone, painted with the initials of Mary Brettan, her own name, was under the toilet-table. She pulled it out, and, dropping on her knees before the trunk that held her wardrobe, hastily pushed in a little of the topmost linen. As she did so, her eyes fell on the wedding-ring she wore; painful at all times, the sight of it now was horrible. She strangled a sob, and, lifting the candlestick, peered stupidly around; by the parlour grate she could hear Tony knocking his pipe out on the bars. Above the washstand a holland "tidy" contained her brushes; she rolled it up and crammed the irregularly-shaped bundle among the linen. In fastening the bag she hesitated, and looked irresolutely at the trunk. Going over to it, she paused again—left it; returned to it. She plunged her arm suddenly into its depths, and thrust the debated thing into her bag as if it burnt her. Across the photographer's address was written, "Yours ever, Tony." Her preparations for leaving him had not occupied ten minutes. Then she went back.

Her cloak and hat lay by the piano where she had cast them on her arrival from the theatre, and, fascinated, the man watched her proceed to put them on.

"There is your ring," she said.

The tears were running down her cheeks; she dabbed at them with a handkerchief as she spoke. The baseness of it all was eating into him. Though the ardour of his earlier passion was gone, and his protestations of affection had been insults, her loss and her aversion served to display the growth of a certain attachment to her of which her possession and her constancy had left him unaware. Twice a plea to her to remain rose to his lips, and twice his tongue was heavy from self-interest and from shame. He followed her instinctively into the passage; his limbs quaked, and his soul was cowed. She had already opened the door and set her foot upon the step.

"Mary!" he gasped.

It was almost beginning to get light. Under the faint paling of the sky the pavements gleamed cold and gray, forlornly visible in the darkness.

"Mary, don't go!"

A rush of chill air swept out of the silence, raising the hair from her brow. The cloak fell about her loosely in thick folds. He put out nervous hands to touch her, and nothing but these folds seemed assailable; they enveloped her, and denied her to him.

"Don't go," he stammered; "stay—forget what I have done!"

She saw the impulse at its worth, but she was grateful for its happening. She knew he would regret it if she listened, knew he knew he would regret it. And

yet, knowing it and disdaining it as she did, the gladfulness and thankfulness were there that he had spoken.

"I could not," she answered—her voice was gentler; "there can never be anything between you and me any more! Good-bye."

She walked from him steadily into the night. The receding figure was erect—uncertain—merged in gloom. He stood gazing after it till it was gone——

CHAPTER II.

THE town lay around her desolate. Her footsteps smote the wretchedly-laid street, and echoed on the loneliness. A cold wind blew in fitful gusts, nipping her cheeks and hands. On the vagueness of the market-place the gilded statue, with its sheen obscured, loomed shapeless as she passed. She heard the lumber and creak of a waggon straining out of sight; the quaver of a cock-crow, then one shriller and more prolonged; two or three thin screams in quick succession from a distant train. She knew, rather than decided, that she would go to London, though there would not be a familiar face to greet her in all its miles of houses, not a door among its hundreds of thousands of doors behind which anybody dwelt who was not strange. She would go there because when a human being is adrift in England, and England means a blur of names equally unpitying, London, somehow, seems the natural place to book to. Few people's ruin leaves them alone at once; the crash, when it comes, generally sees certain friends about who prove loyal beneath the shock of the catastrophe, and only drop away afterwards under the wearisomeness of the worries. It is the situation of few to emerge from the wreck of a home without any personality dominating their consciousness as the counsellor to whom they must fly for aid. But it was the situation of Mary

Brettan to be without a soul to turn to in the world, and briefly it had happened thus: Her father had been a country doctor with a large practice among patients who could not afford to pay. From the standpoint of humanity his conduct was admirable; regarded from the domestic hearthstone perhaps it was a little less. The practitioner who neglected the wife of the mayor in order to attend a villager, because the villager's condition was more critical, offered small promise of leaving his child provided for, and before Mary was sixteen the problems of the rent and butcher's book were as familiar to her as the surgery itself. The exemplary doctor and unpractical parent struggled along more or less placidly by means of the girl's surveillance. Had he survived her, it is difficult to determine what would have become of him, but, dying first, he had her protection to the end. She found herself after the funeral with a crop of bills, some shabby furniture, and the necessity for earning a living. The furniture and the bills were easy to dispose of; they represented a sum in division with nothing over. The important consideration was what she was fitted to do. She knew none of those things which used to be called "accomplishments," and are to-day the elements of education. Her French was the French of "Le Petit Précepteur'; in German she was still bewildered by the article. And, a graver drawback —since the selling-price of education is an outrage on its cost—she had not been brought up to any trade. She belonged, in fact, and circumstances had caused her to discover it, to the ranks of refined incompetence: the incompetence that will not live by menial labour because it is refined; the refinement that cannot support

itself by any brain work because it is incompetent. It was suggested that she might possibly enter the hospital of a neighbouring town and try to qualify for a sick-nurse. She said, "Very well." By-and-by she was told she could be admitted to the hospital, and, if she proved herself capable, that would be the end of her troubles. She said "Very well" again, and this time "thank you."

She had a good constitution, and she saw that if she failed here she might starve at her leisure before any further efforts were put forth on her behalf; so she gave satisfaction in her probation, and became at length a nurse like the others, composed and reliable. When that stage arrived, she owned to having fainted, and suppressed the fact, after an early experience of the operating-room; her reputation was established, and it did not matter now. The surgeon smiled.

Miss Brettan had been Nurse Brettan several years, when an actor who had met with an accident was placed as inmate of one of the beds allotted to her charge. The mishap had cost him his engagement, and he bewailed his fate to everyone who would listen. The person who heard most was naturally his nurse, and she began by feeling sorry for him. He was a paying patient, or they would have turned him out with a pair of clumsy white crutches much sooner; as it was, it was many weeks before he was pronounced well enough to leave, and during those weeks she remembered what in the years' routine she had forgotten—that she was a woman, capable of love.

One evening she learnt that the man who had taught her this also cared for her; and he asked her to

marry him. She stooped as he drew her down, and across the tea-tray they kissed silently, so that the patients on either side might not hear. Then she went upstairs, and cried—with joy.

He talked to her about himself more than ever after that, suppressing only the one all-important fact he lacked the courage to avow; and when at last he went away their betrothal was made public, and it was settled she should join him in London as soon as he was able to write for her to come.

There were many expressions of goodwill heaped upon Nurse Brettan on the summer morning that she bade the Yaughton Hospital farewell; a joint wedding-gift from the other nurses was presented, and everybody shook her hand, and wished her a life of happiness, for she was popular. Carew met her at Euston; he had written he had obtained another engagement, and that they would shortly be starting together on the tour, but in the meanwhile were to be married in town. It was the first time she had been to the Metropolis. He took her to lodgings in Guilford Street, and there occurred their great scene.

When a boy, he confessed, he had made a desperate marriage; he had not set eyes on the woman since he discovered her past, but he could not dissolve the union, because the law did not permit it. He was bound to a wanton, and he loved Mary. Would she forgive his deception, and be his wife in everything except the ceremony that could not be performed?

It was a very terrible scene indeed; he thought for a minute he had killed her. For so many minutes that he believed her lost to him she could only be brought

to give ear to his entreaties by force, and he upbraided himself for not having disclosed his position in the first instance. He had excused his cowardice by calling it expedience. But, to do him justice, he did not do justice to himself. The delay was due far less to his sense of its expedience than to the tremors of his cowardice. Now he suffered scarcely less than she.

Had his plea been based on any but the insuperable obstacle it was, it would have failed to a certainty, but his helplessness gave the sophistry of both full play. He harped on the "grandeur of the sacrifice" she would be making for him, and the phrase pierced her misery. He cried to her it would be a heroism, and she wondered dully if it really would. She queried if there was indeed a higher duty than denial—if her virtue could be merely selfishness in disguise. His insistence on the nobility of consent went very far with her; it did seem a beautiful thing to let sunshine into her lover's life at the cost of her own transgression. And then in the background burnt a hot shame at the thought of being questioned and commiserated when she returned to the hospital with a petition to be reinstalled. The arguments of both were very stale, and they equally blinked the fact that the practical use of matrimony is to protect woman against the innate fickleness of man. He demanded why, from a rational point of view, the comradeship of two people should be any more sacred because a third person in a surplice said it was; and she, with his arms round her, began to persuade herself he was a martyr, who had broken his leg that she might cross his path and give him consolation. Ultimately he triumphed, and a fortnight later she burst into a

tempest of sobs,—in suddenly realizing how happy she was.

He introduced her to everybody as his wife, their "honeymoon" being spent in the, to her, unfamiliar atmosphere of a theatrical tour. One of the first places the company visited was West Hartlepool, and he and she had lodgings outside the town in a little sea-swept village—a stretch of sand, and a lane or two, with a sprinkling of cottages—called Seaton Carew, from which, he told her, he had borrowed his professional name. She said, "Dear Seaton Carew!" and felt in a silly minute that she longed to strain the sunny prospect against her heart.

In the rawness of dawn a clock struck five, and she stood forsaken in the streets.

The myriad clocks of Leicester took up the burden, and the air was beaten with their din. The way to the station appeared endless; yards were preternaturally lengthened; and ever pressing on, yet ever with a lonely vista to be distanced, the walk to it began to be charged with the oppression of a nightmare, in which the terrified sleeper pursues some illimitable road seeking a destination that has vanished.

At length the building loomed before her, ponderously still, and she passed in across the cob-stones. There were no indications of life about the place; the booking-office was fast shut, and between the dimly-burning lamps the empty track of rails lay blue. For all she knew to the contrary, she would have to wait some hours.

By-and-by, however, a sleepy-eyed porter lounged into sight, and she learnt there would be a train in a

few minutes. Shortly after his advent she was able to procure a ticket, a third-class ticket, which diminished the little sum in her possession by eight shillings and a halfpenny; and returning to the custody of her bag, she waited miserably until the line of carriages thundered into view.

It was a wretched journey—a ghastly horror of a journey—but it did not seem particularly long; with nothing to look forward to, she had no cause to be impatient. Intermittently she dozed, waking with a start as the train jerked to a standstill, and the name of the station was bawled out. Only when St. Pancras was reached she felt she had been travelling a long time. Her limbs were cramped as she descended among the groups of dreary-faced passengers rapidly thinning, and the burden on her brain lay like a physical weight. She had not washed since the previous evening, and she made her way to the waiting-room, where the contents of her purse were further decreased by a dejected attendant; after which, having paid twopence to leave the bag behind her while she traversed the city, she went out to search for a room.

A coffee-bar with a quantity of stale pastry heaped in the window reminded her that she needed breakfast. She entered it, and a man with blue shirt-sleeves rolled over red arms brought her tea and bread-and-butter at a sloppy table. The repast, if not enjoyable, served to refresh her, and was worth the fourpence she could very ill afford. Some of the faintness passed, and when she stood in the fresh air again her head was clearer; the vagueness with which she had thought and spoken was gone.

It was not quite five minutes to eight; she wished she had rested in the waiting-room. To be seeking a lodging at five minutes to eight would look strange. Still, she could not reconcile herself to going back; and she was eager, besides, to find a home as quickly as possible, yearning to be alone with the door shut and a pillow.

She turned down Judd Street, forlornly scanning the intersecting squalor. The tenements around her were not attractive. On the parlour-floor limp chintz curtains hid the interiors from view, but the steps and the areas, and here and there a frouzy head and arm protruding for a milkcan, were strong in suggestion of slatternly discomfort. In Brunswick Square the aspect was more cheerful, but the rooms here were obviously above her means. She walked along, and came unexpectedly into Guilford Street, almost opposite the house where she had given herself to Tony. The sudden sight of it was not the shock she would have imagined it must prove; indeed, she was sensible of a dull sort of wonder at the absence of sensation. But for the veranda and confirmatory number, the outside would have borne no significance to her; yet it had been in that house—— What a landmark in her life's history was represented by that house! What emotions had flooded her soul behind the stolid frontage she had nearly passed unrecognised! How she had wept and suffered, and prayed and joyed, inside the walls which would have borne no significance to her but for a veranda and the number that proclaimed it was so! The thoughts were deliberate; the past was not flashed back at her, she retraced it half tenderly in the midst of her trouble. None the less, the

idea of taking up her quarters on the spot was eminently repugnant, and she rounded several corners before she permitted herself to ring at a bell.

Her summons was answered by a flurried servant-girl, who, hearing she wanted a lodging, became helplessly incoherent—as is the manner of servant-girls where lodgings are let—and fled to the basement murmuring "missis."

Mary contemplated the hat-stand until the "missis" advanced towards her along the passage. There was a flavour of abandoned breakfast about missis, an air of interruption; and when she perceived the stranger on her threshold was a young woman, and a charming woman, and a woman by herself, the air of interruption which she had been struggling to conceal all the way up the kitchen-stairs began to be coupled with an expression of defensive virtue.

"I am looking for a room," said Mary.

"Yes," said the householder, eyeing her askance.

"You have one to let, I think, by the card?"

"Yes, there is a room."

She made no movement to show it, however; she stood on the mat nursing her elbows.

"Can you let me see it—if it isn't inconvenient so early?"

"Oh, as to that!" said the landlady. She preceded her to the top-floor, but with no marked alacrity. "This is the room," she said.

It was a back attic of the regulation pattern: brown drugget, yellow chairs, and a bed of parti-coloured clothing. Nevertheless, it seemed to be clean, and Mary was prepared to take anything.

"What is the rent?" she asked wearily.

"Did you say your husband would be joining you?"

"My husband? No, I am a widow."

There was a glance shot at her hand. She wore gloves, but saw it would have been wiser to have told the truth, and said "I am unmarried."

"As a single room, the rent is seven shillings. You would be able to give me references, of course?"

"I am afraid I could not do that," she answered, not a little surprised. "I have only just arrived; my luggage is at the station."

"Humph, what do you work at?"

"Really," she exclaimed, "I am looking for a room! You want references; well, I will pay you in advance."

"I don't take single ladies," answered the woman bluntly.

Mary looked at her bewildered; she thought she had not made herself understood.

"I should be quite willing to pay in advance," she repeated. "I am a stranger in London, so I cannot refer you to anyone here; but I will pay for the first week now, if you like?"

"I don't take ladies; I must ask you to look somewhere else, if you please."

They went down in silence. Virtue turned the handle with its backbone stiff, and Mary passed out, giving a quiet "Good-day." Her blood was tingling under the inexplicable insolence of the treatment she had received, and she had yet to learn that in the greatest metropolis of the world an unaccompanied woman may seek a lodging until she falls exhausted

on the pavement; the unaccompanied woman being to the London landlady an improper person—inadmissible not because she is improper, but because her impropriety is not monopolized.

During the next hour repulse followed repulse. Sometimes, with the curt assertion that they did not take ladies, the door was shut in her face; frequently she was conducted to a room, only to be cross-examined and refused, as with her first venture, just when she was on the point of engaging it. Sometimes an apartment was displayed indifferently, and there were no questions put at all, but in these instances the terms asked were so exorbitant that she came out marvelling not comprehending the cause.

It occurred to her to try the places where she would be known—not the Guilford Street house, the associations of that would be quite unendurable, but some of the apartments Carew and she had occupied when they had come to town between the tours. None of these addresses were in the neighbourhood, however and the notion was too distasteful to be adopted save on impulse.

She set her teeth, and pulled bell after bell. Along Southampton Row, through Cosmo Place into Queen Square, she wandered while the day grew brighter and brighter; down Devonshire Street into Theobald's Road past the Holborn Town Hall. Amid these reiterated demands of references a sudden terror seized her: she remembered the need of the certificate that she had brought away when she quitted the hospital. She had never thought about it since. It might be lying crushed in a corner of the trunk she had left behind in Leices

ter; it might long ago have got destroyed, she did not know; it had never occurred to her that the resumption of her former calling would one day present itself as her natural resource. Under ordinary circumstances the loss would have been a trifle, but since to refer directly to the matron was to her an impossibility, inasmuch as it would lead to the exposure of what she would never avow, her true position in the interval, the absence of a certificate meant the absence of any testimony to her being a qualified nurse. As the helplessness of her plight rushed in upon her she trembled. How long must she not expect to wait for employment when she had nothing to speak for her? To go back to nursing would be more difficult than to earn a living in a capacity she had never essayed. And she could wait so short a time for anything, so horribly short a time! She would starve if she did not find something soon!

Buses jogged by her laden with sober-faced men and women, their homes behind them, bound for the avocations that sustained the white elephant of life. Shops already gave evidence of trade, and children with uncovered heads sped along the curb with "ha'porths o' milk," or mysterious breakfasts folded in scraps of newspaper. Each atom of the awakening bustle passed her engrossed by its own existence, operated by its separate interests, revolving in its individual world. London looked to her a city without mercy or impulse, populated to brimfulness, and flowing over. Every chink and crevice seemed stocked with its appointed denizens, and the hope of finding bread here which nobody's hand was clutching appeared presumption.

Eleven o'clock had struck—that is to say, she had been walking for more than three hours—when, espying a card with "Furnished Room to Let" suspended from a blind, her efforts to gain shelter were successful at last. It was an unpretentious little house, in an equally unpretentious turning, and a sign on the doorway intimated that it was the residence of J. Shuttleworth, mason.

A hard-featured woman, presumably the mason's wife, replied to the dispirited knock, and, confronted by a would-be lodger who was dressed like a lady, immediately added eighteenpence to the rent she habitually required. She asked five shillings a week, and Mary agreed to it instanter, and was grateful.

"About your meals, miss?" said Mrs. Shuttleworth, when Miss Brettan had sunk on to a straight-up chair which divided with a truckle-bedstead the accommodation for repose. "Dinners I can't do for yer, nor would I promise it; but brekfus and so far as a cup o' tea goes in the evening, why, you can 'ave a bit of something brought up when we takes our own. I suppose that'll suit you, won't it?"

"A cup of tea and some bread-and-butter," answered Mary, "in the morning and afternoon, if you can manage it, will do very nicely, thank you." She roused herself to the exigencies of the occasion. "How much will that be?" she questioned.

"Oh, well, we shan't break yer! As to the five shillings: why, the rent we always haves in advance."

The rent was forthcoming, and one more superfluity in the jostle of existence profited by the misfortunes of another: going back to the wash-tub buoyant.

Upstairs the lodger remained motionless; she was so tired that it was a luxury to sit still, and for awhile she was more alive to the bodily relief than the mental burden. It was afternoon by the time she faced the necessity of returning to St. Pancras for her bag, and, pushing up the rickety window to let in some air during her absence, she proceeded to explore the lower regions to ascertain the nearest route.

She learnt she was much nearer to the station than she had supposed, and after a brief excursion had her property in her possession again. Her head felt oddly light, and she was puzzled by the dizziness until she remembered she had had nothing to eat since eight o'clock. The thought of food was sickening, though, and it was not till five o'clock, when the tea was furnished, with a hunch of bread, and a slap of butter in the middle of a plate, that she attempted to break her fast.

And now ensued a length of dreary hours, an awful purposeless evening, of which every minute was weighted with despair. Fortunately the weather was not very cold, so the absence of a fire was less a hardship than a lack of company; but the fatigue, which had been acting as a partial opiate to her trouble, gradually passed, and her brain ached with the torture of reflection.

With nothing to do but to think, she sat in the upright chair, staring at the empty grate, and picturing Tony during the familiar "waits" at the theatre. An evil-smelling lamp flickered despondently on the table; outside, the street was discordant with the cries of children. To realize that it was only this morning the

blow had fallen upon her was impossible; an interval of several days appeared to roll between the poky attic and her farewell. The calamity seemed already old. "Oh, Tony!" she murmured. She got his likeness out. "Yours ever"—the mockery of it! She did not hate him, she did not even tell herself she did; she contemplated the faded "cabinet" quite gently, and held it before her a long time. It had been taken in Manchester, and she recalled the afternoon it was done. All sorts of trivialities in connection with it recurred to her. He was wearing a lawn tie, and she remembered it had been the last clean one and had got mislaid. Their search for it, and comic desperation at its loss, all came back to her quite clearly. "Oh, Tony!" Her fancies projected themselves into his future, and she saw him in a score of different scenes, but always famous, and in his greatness with the memory of Mary flitting across his mind. Then she wondered what she would have done if she had borne him a child; whether the child would have been in the garret with her. But no, if he had been a father this would not have happened. He was always fond of children; to have given him a child of his own would have kept his love for her aglow.

Presently a diversion was effected by the home-coming of Mr. Shuttleworth, evidently drunk, and abusing his wife with disjointed violence. Next the woman's voice arose shrieking recrimination, the babel subsiding amid staccato passages, alternately gruff and shrill, until silence reigned once more.

The disturbance tended to obtrude the practical side of her dilemma, and the vital importance of

ily obtaining work of some sort, no matter what, led her. To-day was Wednesday, and on the iesday following, unless she was to go forth home- there would be the lodging to pay for again, and reakfasts and teas supplied in the meanwhile. She l have to spend money outside as well; she had ie, however poorly, and there were postage-stamps, erhaps train fares, to be considered: some of the tisers she answered might live beyond walking ice. Altogether, she certainly required a pound. she had towards it—with a sinking of the heart irned out her purse to make certain—exactly two iinepence.

CHAPTER III.

NEXT morning her efforts were begun. It rained, and she commenced to understand what it means to the unemployed to tramp a city where two days out of every four are wet.

To purchase some papers, and examine them at home, was out of the question; but she was aware there were news-rooms where for a penny she could see them all. Directed to such an institution by a speckled boy, conspicuous for his hat and ears, she found several despondent-looking women turning over a heap of periodicals at a table. The "dailies" were spread upon stands against the walls, and at a smaller table under the window lay a number of slips, with pens and ink, for the convenience of customers wishing to make memoranda of the vacant situations. She went first to the *Times*, because it was on the stand nearest to her, and proceeded from one paper to another until she had made a tour of the lot.

The "Wanted" columns were of the customary order; the needy endeavouring to gull the necessitous with specious phrases, and the well-established prepared to sweat them without any disguise at all. A drapery house had a vacancy for a young woman "to dress fancy window, and able to trim hats, etc., when desired" —salary fifteen pounds. There was a person seeking a

general servant who would be willing to pay twenty pounds a year for the privilege of doing the work. This advertisement was headed "Home offered to a lady," and a few seconds were required to grasp the stupendous insolence of it. A side-street stationer, in want of a sales-woman, advertised for an "Apprentice at a moderate premium"; and the usual percentage of City firms dangled the decaying bait of "An opportunity to learn the trade." Her knowledge of the glut of experienced actresses enabled her to smile at the bogus theatrical managers who had "immediate salaried engagements waiting for amateurs of good appearance"; but some of the "home employment" swindles took her in, and, discovering nothing better to respond to, she jotted these addresses down.

From the news-room she went into a dairy, and dined on a glass of milk and a bun, whence, after an inevitable outlay on stamps and stationery, she returned to the lodging a shilling poorer than she had gone out.

Unacquainted with the wiles of the impostors she was answering, the thought of her applications sustained her somewhat; it seemed to her that out of the several openings one must be practicable at least. She did not fail to adopt the calculation habitual to all novices under the circumstances; she reduced the promised earnings by half, and believed she was viewing the prospect in a sober light which, if mistaken at all, erred on the side of pessimism.

The envelopes she had enclosed came back to her late the following afternoon, and the circulars varied mainly in colour and the prices of materials for sale. In all particulars essential to prove them frauds to every-

body excepting the perfect fools who must exist to explain the recurrence of the advertisements, they were the same.

With the extinction of the hope, the darkness of her outlook was intensified, and henceforth she eschewed the offers of "liberal incomes," and confined her attentions to the illiberal wages. Day after day now she resorted to the news-room—one stray more the proprietor saw regularly—resolved not to relinquish her access to the papers while a coin remained to her to pay for admission. She indited many letters, and spent her evenings vainly listening for the postman's knock. She attributed her repeated failures to there being no mention of references in her replies, which were so concise and nicely written that she felt sure they could not have failed from any other reason. The probability was that her nicely-written notes were never read: merely tossed with scores of others, all unopened, into the waste-paper basket, after a selection had been made from the top thirty. This is the fate of most of the nicely-written notes that go in reply to advertisements in the newspapers, only the people who compose them, and post them with little prayers, fortunately do not suspect it. If they suspected it, they would lose the twenty-four hours' comfort of hugging a false hope to their souls; and an oasis of hope is a desirable thing at the cost of a postage-stamp.

One evening an answer actually did come, and an answer in connection with a really beautiful "wanted." When the epistle was handed to her, she had hardly dared to hope it related to that particular situation at all. The advertisement had run:

"Secretary required by a Literary Lady. Must be sociable, and have no objection to travel on the Continent. Apply in own handwriting to C. B., care of Messrs. Furnival," etc.

The signature, however, was not "C. B.'s." The communication was from Messrs. Furnival. They wrote that they judged by Miss Brettan's application she would suit their client; and on receipt of half a crown —their usual booking fee—they would forward the authoress's address.

If she had had half a crown to send, she might not have done the thing she did; as it was, instead of remitting to Messrs. Furnival's office, she called there.

It proved to be a very small and very dark back room on the ground-floor, and Messrs. Furnival were represented by a stout gentleman of shabby apparel and mellifluous manner. Mary began by saying she was the applicant who had received his letter about "C. B.'s" advertisement; but as this announcement did not seem sufficiently definite to enable the stout gentleman to converse on the subject with fluency and freedom, she added that "C. B." was a literary lady who stood in need of a secretary.

On this he became very vivacious indeed. He told her that her chance of securing the post was an excellent one. No, it was not a certainty, as she appeared to have understood; but he did not think she had much occasion for misgivings. Her speed in shorthand was in excess of the rate for which their client had stipulated.

She said: "Why, I especially stated that if shorthand was essential I should be no use."

He said: "So you did. I meant to say, your type-writing was your recommendation."

"Mr. Furnival," she exclaimed, "I wrote, 'I am neither a type-writer nor stenographer'! You must be confusing me with someone else. Perhaps you have answered another application as well?"

Perhaps he had.

"You are my first experience of an applicant for a secretaryship who hasn't learnt type-writing *or* short-hand," he said in an injured tone. "Of course, since you don't know either, you'd be no good at all—positively not the slightest!"

"Then," she said, "why did you ask me to send you half a crown?"

Before he could spare time to enlighten her as to his reason for this line of action, they were interrupted by an urchin who dashed in and deposited an armful of letters on the table. The mellifluous one acknowledged the attention airily, and she came away wondering what percentage of the women it was Messrs. Furnival's mistake to suppose would "suit their client" enclosed postal-orders to pay the "fee."

Quite ineffectually she visited some legitimate agencies, and once she walked to Battersea in time to learn that the berth which was the object of her journey had just been filled. Even when one walks to Battersea, and dines for twopence, however, the staying-powers of two-and-nine are very limited; and the dawning of the dreaded date for Mrs. Shuttleworth's account found her capital exhausted.

Among her scanty possessions, the only article she could suggest converting into money was the silver watch

which she wore attached to a guard. It had belonged to her as a girl; she had worn it as a nurse; it had travelled with her on tour throughout her life with Carew. What a pawn-broker would lend her on it she did not know, but she supposed a sovereign. Had she been better off, she would have supposed two sovereigns, for she was as ignorant of its value as of the method of pledging it; but being destitute, a pound seemed to her a presumptuous amount to ask for anything. She made her way heavily into the street. She felt as if her errand were imprinted on her face, and when she reached and paused beneath the sign of the golden balls, she fancied all the passers-by were watching her.

The window offered a pretext for hesitation—a prelude to the entry. She remained inspecting the collection behind the glass; perhaps anyone who saw her go in might imagine it was with the intention of buying something. She was nerving herself to the necessary pitch when, giving a final glance over her shoulder, she saw a bystander looking in her direction. Her courage took flight, and, feeling inexpressibly mean, she sauntered on, deciding to explore for a shop in a more secluded position.

Though she was ashamed of her retreat, the respite was a relief to her, and it was not until the next emporium was gained that she perceived the longer she delayed the critical moment the more embarrassing it would become. She went hurriedly in. There was a row of narrow doors extending down a passage, and, pulling one open, she found the tiny compartment occupied by a woman and a bundle. Starting back, she essayed the next partition, which proved vacant; and

standing away from the counter, lest her profile should be detected by her neighbour in distress, she waited for someone to come to her.

Nobody taking any notice, she rapped to attract attention. A young man lounged along, and she put the watch down.

"How much?" he said.

"A pound."

He caught it up and withdrew, conveying the impression that he thought very little of it. She thought very little of it herself directly it was in his hand. His hand was a masterpiece of expression, whereas his voice never wavered from two notes.

"Ten shillings," he said, reappearing.

"Ten shillings is very little," she murmured. "Surely it is worth more than that?"

"Going to take it?"

He slid the watch across to her.

"Thank you," she said; "yes."

A doubt whether it would be sufficient crept over her the instant she had agreed, and she wished she had declined the offer. To call him back, however, was beyond her, and when he returned it was with the ticket.

"Name and address?"

New to the requirements of a pawnbroker, she stammered the true one: convinced the woman with the bundle would overhear and remember. Even then she was dismayed to find the transaction was not concluded; he asked her for a halfpenny, and, with the blood in her face, she signified she had no change. At length, though, she was free to depart, grasping a rouleau of

silver and coppers; and transferring the coins guiltily to her purse, when the shop was too far distant to appear related to the action, she commenced the ordinary programme of her day.

It was striking five when she mounted to the attic, and she saw that Mrs. Shuttleworth, with the punctuality peculiar to cheap landladies when the lodger is out, had already brought up the tray. On the plate was her bill; she snatched at it anxiously, and was relieved to find it ran thus:

	s.	d.
Bred	1	2
Butter		10
Milk		3½
Tea		6
Oil		2
Shuger		2½
To room til nex Wennesday .	5	0
	8	2

So far, then, she had been equal to emergencies, and another week's shelter was assured. The garret began to assume almost an air of comfort, refined by her terror of losing it. When she reflected that the week divided her from literal starvation, she cried that she *must* find something to do—never mind what its nature, she must! Then she realized she could find it no more easily because it was a case of "must" than if it had been simply expedient, and the futility of the feminine "must," when she was already doing all she could do, served to accentuate her helplessness. She prayed passionately, without being able to feel much confidence in the efficacy of prayer, and told herself

she did not deserve that God should listen to her, because she was guilty, and sinful, and bad. She did not seek consolation in repeating that it was always darkest before dawn, nor strive to fortify herself with any other of the aphorisms belonging to the vocabulary of sorrow for other people. The position being her own, she looked it straight in the eyes, and admitted the chances were in favour of her being very shortly without a bed to lie upon.

Each night she came a few pence nearer to the end; each night now she sat staring from the window, imagining the sensations of wandering homeless. And at last broke the day—a sunless and chilly day—when she rose and went out possessed of one penny, and without any means of adding to it. This penny might be reserved to diminish the hunger that would seize her presently, or she might give herself a final chance among the newspapers. Having breakfasted, the hunger looked distant, and she decided for the final chance.

As she turned the pages her hands trembled, and for a second the paragraphs swam together under her gaze. The next instant, standing out clearly from the sea of print, she saw an advertisement like the smile of a friend:

"Useful Companion wanted to elderly lady; one with some experience of invalids preferred. Apply personally, between 3 and 5, 'Trebartha,' N. Finchley."

Had it been framed for her, it could hardly have suited her better. The wish for personal application itself was an advantage, for in conversation, she felt, the obstacle of having no references could be surmounted with far less trouble than by letter. A string of frank

allusions to the difficulty, a dozen easy phrases, leapt into her mind, so that, in fancy, the interview was already in progress, and terminating with pleasant words in the haven of engagement.

She searched no further, and it was not until she was leaving the shop that she remembered the miles she would have to walk. To start so early, moreover, would be useless, so on second thoughts she determined to pass the morning where she was.

She was surprised to discover she was not singular in this decision, and wondered if all the customers who stayed so long had anywhere else to go. Many of them never turned a leaf, but sat at the table dreamily eyeing a journal as if they had forgotten it was there. She watched the people coming in, noting the unanimity with which they made for the advertisement-sheets first, and speculating as to the nature of the work each sought.

There was a woman garbed in black, dejected and precise; she was a governess, manifestly. Once, when she had been young, and insolent with the courage of youth, she would have mocked a portrait looking as she looked now; there was little enough mockery left in her this morning. She quitted the "dailies" unrewarded, and proceeded to the table, her thin-lipped mouth set a trifle harder than before. A girl with magenta feathers in her hat bounced in, tracing her way down the columns with a heavy fore-finger, and departing jauntily with a blotted list. This was a domestic servant, Mary understood. A shabby man of sinister expression covered an area of possibilities: a broken-down tutor perhaps, a professional man gone to the bad. He

looked like Mephistopheles in the prompter's clothes, she thought, contemplating him with languid curiosity. The reflections flitted across the central idea while she sat nervously waiting for the hours to pass, and when she considered it was at length time, she asked the newsagent in which direction Finchley lay. She omitted to state she had to walk there, but obtained sufficient information anent a tram-track to guide her up to Hampstead Heath, where of course she could inquire again.

The sun gave no promise of shining, and a raw bleak wind, tossing the rubbish of the gutters into little whirlpools, rendered pedestrianism exceedingly unpleasant. She was dismayed to find how long a journey she was bound on, arriving at the tram-terminus already fatigued, and then ascertaining she had not covered half the route. Finchley was nothing but a name to her, and steadily pushing on along a hedge-bound road which unrolled itself before her feet with never-changing pertinacity, she began to fear she would never reach her goal at all. To add to the discomfort, it commenced to snow slightly, and she grew less and less sanguine with every hundred yards. The vision of the smiling lady, the buoyancy of her own glib sentences, faded from her, and the thought of the utter abjectness that would come of refusal made the salvation of acceptance appear much too wonderful to occur.

When at last she reached it, "Trebartha" proved to be a stunted villa in red brick, of "an architecture expressive merely of the impotence of the architect to express anything." It was one of a row, each of the

other stunted villas being similarly endowed with a name befitting an estate; and suspense, as is the habit of it, catching discouragement from the most extraneous detail, Mary's heart sank as the housemaid disclosed the badly-lighted passage.

She was ushered into the sitting-room; and the woman who entered presently had been suggested by it. She seemed the natural complement of the haggard prints, of the four cumbersome chairs in a line against the wall, of the family Bible on the crochet tablecover. She wore silk, dark and short, over side-spring boots; plain, save for three narrow bands of velvet at the hem. She wore a gold watch-chain hanging round her neck, garlanded over her portly bosom. She said she was the invalid lady's married daughter, and her tone implied a consciousness of that higher merit which the woman whose father has left her comfortably off feels over the woman whose father hasn't.

"You have called about my mother's advertisement for a companion?" she said.

"Yes; I have had a long experience of nursing. I think I should be able to do all you want."

"Have you ever lived as companion?"

"No," said Mary, "I have never done that, but"—she essayed a tentative lightness—"I think I am companionable; I don't fancy I am difficult to get on with."

"What was your—won't you sit down?—what was your last place?"

Mary moistened her lips.

"I am," she said, "rather awkwardly situated. I may as well tell you at once I am a stranger here, and, do you know, I find that a great bar in the way of my

getting employment. Not being known, I have of course no friends I can refer people to, and—well, people always seem to think the fact of being a stranger in a city is rather a discreditable thing. I have found that. They do." She looked for a gleam of response in the stolid countenance, but it was as void of expression as the furniture. "As I say, I have had a lengthy experience of nursing; as a companion in whom knowledge like that is desired, I—it sounds conceited—but I should be exceedingly useful. It is just the thing I am fitted for."

The married daughter asked: "You have been a nurse, you say? But not here?"

"Not here," said Mary, "no. Of course," she added, "that doesn't detract from——"

"Oh, quite so. We have had several young women here already to-day. Do I understand you to mean there is no one you can give as your reference?"

"Yes, that is, unfortunately enough, the case. I do hope you don't consider it an insuperable obstacle. You know you take servants without 'characters' sometimes when——"

"I *never* take a servant without a 'character.' I have never done such a thing in my life. Really!"

"I did not mean you personally," said Mary, with hasty deprecation; "I was speaking——"

"I am most particular on the point; my mother is most particular, too."

"Generally speaking. I meant people do take servants without 'characters' occasionally when they are hard pushed."

"Our servants are only too wishful to remain with

us. My mother has had her present cook eight years, and her last one was only induced to leave because a very respectable young man—a young man in quite a fair way of business—made her an offer of marriage. She had been here even longer than eight years—twelve I think it was, or thirteen. It was believed at the time that what first attracted the young man's attention to her was the many years my mother had retained her in our household. I am sure there are no circumstances under which my mother would consent to receive a young person who could give no proof of her trustworthiness and good conduct."

"Do you mean, madam, that you cannot engage me? It—it is a matter of life and death to me," exclaimed Mary; "pray let me see the lady!"

"Your manner," said the married daughter, "is strange. Quite authoritative for your position." She rose. "You will find it helpful to be less haughty when you speak, less opinionated; your manner you will find is very much against you. Oh, my word! no violence, if you please, miss."

"Violence?" gasped Mary; "I am not violent. It was my last hope, that's all, and it is over. I wish you good-day, madam."

So much had happened in a few minutes—inside and out—that the roads were rapidly whitening when she issued from "Trebartha," and the flutter of the snowflakes had developed into a steady fall. She was at first scarcely sensible of it; the desperation in her heart kept out the cold, and carried her along for a while in a semi-rush. Words broke from her breathlessly. She felt that she had fallen from a high estate;

that the independence of her life with Carew had been a period of dignity and power; that erstwhile she could have awed the dull-witted philistine who had humbled her. "The hateful woman! Oh, the wretch! To have to sue to a creature like that!" Well, she would starve now, she supposed, her excitement spending itself; she would die of starvation, like characters in fiction, or the people one read of in the newspapers—the newspapers called it "exposure," but it was the same thing; "exposure" sounded less offensive to the other people who read about it, that was all. The force of education is so strong that, much as she insisted on such a death, and close as she had approached to it, she was unable to realize its happening to her. She told herself it must. The world was of a sudden horribly wide and empty; but for Mary Brettan to actually die like that had an air of exaggeration about it still. Trudging forward, she pondered on it, and the fact came nearer; the sensation of the world's widening about her grew stronger. She felt alone in the midst of illimitable space. There seemed nothing but air around her, nothing tangible, nothing to catch at. Oh, God! how tired she was, and how weak! She could not go on much farther.

The snow whirled against her in wind-driven gusts, clinging to her hair, and filling her eyes and nostrils. Her exhaustion was overpowering her, and still how many miles? Each of the benches she passed along the path was a fresh temptation, and at last she dropped on one, too tired to stand up, wet and shivering, and shielding her face from the storm.

She dropped upon it like any tramp or stray,

Having held out to the uttermost, she did not know whether she would ever get up again—did not think about it, and did not care. Her limbs ached for relief, and she seized it on the highroad, because relief on the highroad was the only sort attainable.

And it was while she cowered there that another figure appeared in the twilight, the figure of a tall old man carrying a black bag. He came briskly down a footpath behind her, gazing to right and left as for something that should be waiting for him. Not seeing it, he whistled, and, the whistle announcing his proximity, Mary looked up, seeing him and a trap backed from the corner of the road simultaneously. The man with the bag stared at her, and after an interval of hesitation spoke.

"It's a dirty nicht," he said, "for ye tae be sittin' there. I'm thinkin' ye're no' weel?"

"Not very," she said.

He inspected her undecidedly.

"An' ye'll tak' your death o' cold if ye dinna get up, it's verra certain. Hoots! ye're shakin' wi' it noo! Bide a wee, an' I'll put some warmth intae ye, young leddy."

Without any more ado, he deposited the bag at her side, proceeding to open it. And, astonishing to relate, the black bag was fitted with a number of little bottles, one of which he extracted, with a glass.

"Is it medicine?" she asked wonderingly.

"Medicine?" he echoed; "nae, it's nae medicine; it's 'Four Diamonds S.O.P.' I'm gi'en ye. It's a braw sample o' Pilcher's S.O.P., ma lassie; nothin' finer in the

trade, on the honour o' Macpheerson. Noo ye drink that doon; it's speerit, an' it'll dae ye guid."

She followed his advice, gulping the yellow liquid while he watched her approvingly. Its strength diffused itself through her frame in ripples of heat, raising her courage, and yet, oddly enough, making her want to cry.

Mr. Macpherson contemplated the bottle solemnly, shaking his head at it with something that sounded like a sigh.

"An' whaur may ye be goin'?" he queried, replacing the cork.

"I am going to town," she answered. "I was walking home, only the storm——"

"Tae toon? Will ye no' ha'e a lift along o' me an' the lad? I'll drive ye intae toon."

"Have you to go there?" she asked, overjoyed.

"There'd be th' de'il tae pay if Macpheerson stayed awa'. Ay, I ha'e tae gang there, and as fast as the mare can trot. Will ye let me help ye in?"

"Yes," she said, "I will; I thank you very much for the offer."

He hoisted her up, struggling in after her, and she and her strange companion, accompanied by an impassible urchin who never uttered a word, started smartly in the direction of the City.

"I am so greatly obliged to you," she murmured, rejoicing at the unexpected comfort in which she found herself, "you don't know!"

"There's nae call for ony obleegation; it's verra welcome ye are. I'm thinkin' the sample did ye a lot o' guid, eh?"

"It did indeed," replied Mary; "it has made me feel a different woman."

"Eh, but it's a gran' speerit!" said the old gentleman with reviving ardour. "There's nae need to speak for it, an' that's a fact; your ain tongue sings its perfection to ye as ye sup it doon. Ye may get ither houses to serve ye cheaper," he continued, after a pause, "I'm no' denyin' that; but tae them that can place the rale article there's nae house like Pilcher's. And Pilcher's best canna be beaten in the trade. I ha'e nae interest tae lie tae ye, ye ken, nor could I tak' ye in wi' the wines and speerits had I the mind. There's the advantage wi' the wines and speerits; ye canna deceive! Ye ha'e the sample, an' ye ha'e the figure—will I book the order or will I no'?"

"It is your business then, Mr.—Macpherson?"

"Will ye no' tak' my card?" he said, producing a large pasteboard; "there, put it awa'. Should ye ever be in need, ma lassie, a line to Macpheerson, care o' the firm's address——"

"How kind of you!" she exclaimed.

"No' a bit," he said; "ye never can tell what may happen, and whether it's for yersel' ye need it, or a recommendation, ye'll ken ye're buying at the wholesale price."

She glanced at him with surprise, looked away again, and they drove along for several minutes in silence.

"Maybe ye ken some family whaur I'd be likely tae book an order noo?" remarked Mr. Macpherson incidentally at length. "Sherry! dae ye no' ken o' a family requirin' sherry? I can dae them sherry at a figure that'll tak' th' breath frae them. Ye canna suspect the

profit—th' weecked ineequitous profit—that sherry's retailed at; wi' three quotations tae the brand often eno', an' a made-up wine at that. Noo, I could supply your frien's wi' 'Crossbones'—the finest in the trade, on the honour of Macpheerson—if ye happen tae ha'e ony who——"

"I don't," she said, "happen to have any."

"There's the family whaur ye're workin', we'll say; a large family maybe, wi' a cellar. For a large family tae be supplied at the wholesale figure——"

"I am sorry, but I don't work."

"Ye don't work, an' ye ha'e no frien's!" he peered at her curiously; "then, ma dear young leddy, ye'll no' think me impertinent if I ax ye how th' de'il ye live?"

The wild idea shot into her brain that perhaps he might be able to put her into the way of something—somewhere—somehow.

"I am a stranger in London," she answered, "looking for employment, quite alone."

"Eh," said Mr. Macpherson, "that's bad, that's verra bad."

He whipped up the horse, and after the momentary comment lapsed into reverie. She called herself a fool for her pains, and stared out dumbly across the melancholy fields.

"Whaur aboots are ye stayin'?" he demanded, after they had passed the Swiss Cottage.

She told him.

"Please don't let me take you out of your way," she said.

"Ye're no' verra far frae ma ain house," he declared.

"Ye had best come in an' warm before ye gang on hame. Ye are in nae hurry, I suppose?"

"No, but——"

"Oh, the mistress will nae mind it. Ye just come in wi' me."

Their conversation progressed by fits and starts until her conductor's domicile was reached, and leaving the trap to the care of the immovable youth, who might have been a mute for any indication he had given to the contrary, she suffered herself without demurring again to be led into a parlour, where a kettle steamed invitingly on the hob.

Mr. Macpherson was greeted by a little woman, evidently the wife referred to, and a rosy offspring, addressed as Charlotte, brought her progenitor a pair of slippers. His introduction of Mary to his family circle was brief.

"'Tis a young leddy," he said, "I gave a litt to. But I dinna ken your name?"

"My name is Brettan," she replied. Then, turning to the woman: "Your husband was so kind as to save me walking home from Finchley, and now he has made me come in with him."

"It was a braw nicht for a walk," opined Macpherson.

"I'm sure I'm glad to see you, miss," responded the woman in cheery Cockney. "Come to the fire and dry yourself a bit, do!"

The initial awkwardness was as slight as might be. Mary's experiences in the stage-world were serviceable, for no better training than a sojourn in Bohemia exists to guide the footsteps over social hillocks. The people

were well-intentioned, too, and, meeting no embarrassment to hamper their heartiness, grew speedily at ease. It reminded the guest of some of her arrivals on tour, one in particular: when, the last week's company not having left yet, she and Tony had traversed half Oldham in search of rooms, finally sitting down with their preserver to bread and cheese in her kitchen. It was loathsome how Tony would keep recurring to her, and always in episodes when he had been jolly and affectionate.

"Your husband tells me he is in the wine business," she observed at the tea-table.

"He is, miss; and never you marry a man who travels in that line," returned his partner, "or the best part of your life you won't know for rights if you're married or not!"

"He is away a good deal, you mean?"

"Away! He's just home about two months in the year—a fortnight at the time, that's what he is! All the rest of it traipsing about from place to place like a wandering gipsy. Charlotte says time and again, 'Ma, have I got a pa, or 'aven't I?'—don't yer, Charlotte?"

"Pa's awful!" said Charlotte, with her mouth full of bread-and-marmalade. "Never mind, pà, you can't help it!"

"Eh, it's a sad pursuit!" rejoined her father gloomily. In the glow of his own fireside Mary was amazed to perceive his enthusiasm for his "wines and speerits" had wholly vanished. "Awa' frae your wife an' bairn, pandering tae th' veecious courses that ruin the immortal soul! Every heart kens its ain bitterness, young

leddy; and Providence in its mysteerious wisdom never designed me for the wine-and-speerit trade."

"Oh lor," said Charlotte," "ma's done it!"

"It was na your mither," said Mr. Macpherson; "it's ma ain conscience, as well ye ken! Dae I no' see the travellers themselves succumb tae th' cussed sippin' and tastin' frae mornin' till nicht? There was Burbage, I mind weel, and there was Broun; guid men both—no better men on th' road. Whaur's Burbage noo—whaur's Broun?"

"Fly away, Peter; fly away, Paul!" interpolated Charlotte.

"Gone!" continued Mr. Macpherson, responding to his own inquiry with morbid unction. "Deed! The Lord be praised, I ha'e the guid sense tae withstand th' infeernal tipplin' masel'. Mony's the time, when I'm talkin' tae a mon in the way o' business, ye ken, I turn the damned glass upside down when he is na lookin'. But there's the folk I sell tae, an' the ithers; what o' them? It's ma trade to praise the evil—tae tak' it into the world, spreadin' it broadcast for the destruction o' mankind. Eh, ma responsibeelity is awfu' tae contemplate!"

"I am sure, James, you mean most noble," said the little woman weakly. "Come, light your pipe comfortable, now; and don't worrit, there's a dear good man!"

The traveller waved the pipe aside; viewed as the type of consolation, he declined it.

"There's a still sma' voice," he said, "ye canna' silence wi' 'bacca; ye canna' silence it wi' herbs nor wi' fine linen. It's wi' me noo, axin' queestions. It says: 'Macpheerson, how dae ye justeefy thy wilfu' conduct?

Why dae ye gloreefy the profeets o' th' airth above thy speeritual salvation, mon? Dae ye no ken that orphans are goin' dinnerless through thy eloquence, an' widows are prodigal wi' curses on a' thy samples an' thy ways?' I canna' answer. There are nichts when the voice will na' let me sleep, ye're weel aware; there are nichts——"

"There are nights when you are most trying, James, I know."

"Woman, it's the warnin' voice that comes tae a sinner in his transgreession! Are there no' viseetations eno' about me, an' dae I no' turn ma een frae them; hardenin' ma heart, and pursuin' ma praise o' Pilcher's wi' a siller tongue? There was a mon ane day at the Peacock—a mon in ma ain inseedious line—an' he swilled his bottle o' sherry, an' he called for his whusky-an'-watter, and he got up on his feet speechifyin', after the commercial dinner. 'The Queen, gentlemen!' he cries, liftin' his glass; an' wi' that he dropped deed, wi' the name o' the royal leddy on his lips! He was a large red mon—he would ha' made twa o' me!"

The circumference of the deceased appeared to be regarded by the traveller as an additional omen. He extended his arms in representation of it, and waved them aloft as if to intimate that Charlotte might detect Nemesis in his own vicinity preparing for a swoop.

"You take the thing too seriously," said Mary. "Nine people out of ten have to be what they can, you know; it is only the tenth who can afford to be what he wishes."

The little woman inquired what her calling was.

"I am very sorry to say I have none," she answered. "I am doing nothing."

There was the instant's restraint that always falls in working circles when one of the company admits to not having any work.

"Unfortunately I know nobody here," she added; "it is very hard to get anything when there is no one to speak for you."

"It must be; but, lor! you must bear up. It's a long lane that has no turning, as they say."

"Only there is no telling where the turning may lead; a lane is better than a bog."

"Wouldn't she do for Pattenden's?" suggested the woman musingly.

"For whom?" exclaimed Mary. "Do you think I can get something? Who are they?"

"James?"

"Pattenden's?" he repeated. "An' what would she dae at Pattenden's?"

"Why, be agent, to be sure—same as you were!"

Mary glanced from one to the other with anxiety.

"Weel, noo, that isn't at a' a bad idea," said Mr. Macpherson meditatively; "dae ye fancy ye could sell books, young leddy, on commeession—a hauf-sovereign, say, for every order ye took? I'm thinkin' a young woman micht dae a verra fair trade at it."

"Oh yes," she replied; "I am certain I could. Half a sovereign each one? Where do I go? Will they take me?"

"I dinna anteecipate ye'll fin' much deefficulty aboot them takin' ye: they dinna risk onythin' by that! I'll gi'e ye the address. They are publishers, and ye just ax for their Mr. Collins when ye go there; tell him ye're wishful tae represent them wi' ane o' their publeecations.

If ye like I'll write your name on ane o' ma ain cards; an' ye can send it in tae him."

"Do!" she said; and he wrote "Introducing Miss Brettan" on the back of another of his extensive pasteboards.

"Ye must na' imagine it's a fortune ye'll be makin'," he observed; "it's different tae ma ain position wi' the wines an' speerits, ye ken: wi' Pilcher's it's a fixed salary, an' Pilcher's pay ma expenses."

"Picher's pay *our* expenses!" affirmed Charlotte the thoughtful.

"They dae," acquiesced the traveller; "there's a sicht o' saving oot o' sax-and-twenty shillin's a day tae an economical parent. But wi' Pattenden's it's precarious; ane week guid, an' anither week bad."

"I am not afraid," declared Mary boldly; "whatever I do, it is better than nothing. I'll go there tomorrow, the first thing. Very many thanks; and to you, too, Mrs. Macpherson, for thinking of it."

"I'm sure I'm glad I did," replied the little body with a laugh; "there's no saying but what you may be doing first-rate after a bit. It's a beginning for you, any way."

"That it is, and am I not glad I met you! But why cannot the publishers allow a salary?" after a pause, "the same as your husband's firm?"

"Ah! they don't; anyhow, not at the beginning. Besides, James has been with Pilcher's ten years now; he wasn't earning so much when he started in the line."

"'Spect one reason that they don't is because such a heap more people buy spirits than books!" said Charlotte. "Pa!"

"Eh, ma lassie?"

"The lady's going to be an agent——"

"Weel?"

"Then, dear pa," said Charlotte, "won't we all drink to the lady's luck in a sample?"

"Ye veecious midget," ejaculated her father wrathfully, "are ye no' ashamed tae mak' sic a proposeetion! Ye'll no drink a sample, will ye, young leddy?"

"I will not indeed!" answered Mary.

"No' but what ye're welcome."

"Thanks," she said; "I will not, really."

"Eh, but ye will, then," he exclaimed; "a sma' sample, ye an' Mrs. Macpheerson th'gither! Whaur's ma bag?"

In spite of her protestations he now drew a bottle out, and the hostess produced a couple of glasses from the cupboard.

"Port!" he said. "The de'il's liquors a' o' them; but, if there's a disteenction, maybe a wee drappie o' the 'Four Grape Balance' deserves mon's condemnation least!" His conflicting emotions delayed the toast some time. "The de'il's liquors!" he groaned again, fingering the bottle irresolutely. "Eh, but it's the 'Four Grape Balance,'" he murmured with reluctant admiration, eyeing the sample against the light. "There! Ye may baith o' ye drink it doon! But masel', I wouldna touch a drap. An' as for ye, ye wee Cockney bairn, if I catch ye tastin' onything stronger than tea in a' your days, or knowin' the flavour o' the perneecious stuff it's your affleected father's duty tae lure the unsuspeecious minds wi'—temptin' the frail tae their eternal ruin, an' servin' the de'il when his sicht is on the Lord—I'll leather ye!"

Charlotte giggled nervously—Figaro-wise, that she might not be obliged to weep—while Mrs. Macpherson, raising the glass to her lips, said "Luck!"

"Luck!" they all echoed.

And Mary, conscious the career would be no heroic one, was also conscious she was not a heroine. "I am," she said to herself, "just a real unhappy woman, in very desperate straits. Wherefore let me do whatever offers itself, and be profoundly grateful if anything can be done at all."

CHAPTER IV.

THE wealth of Messrs. Pattenden and Sons—which runs into figures exceptional even among publishing firms—is not indicated by the arrangement of their London branch. A flight of narrow stairs, none too clean, leads to a pair of doors respectively painted "Warehouse" and "Private"; and having performed the superfluous ceremony of knocking at the former, Mary found herself in front of a rough counter, behind which two or three young men were busily engaged in stacking books. There were books in profusion, books in virginity, books tempting and delightful to behold. Volume upon volume, crisp in cover and shiny of edge, they were piled on table and heaped on floor; and the young men handled them with as little concern as if they had been grocery. Such is the force of habit.

In response to her inquiry, her name and the card were despatched to Mr. Collins by a miniature boy endowed with a gape that threatened to lift his head off, and, pending the interview, she attempted to subdue her nervousness.

A man with a satchel bustled in, and made hurried reference to "Vol. two of the Dic." and "The fourth of the Ency." Against the window an accountant with a fresh complexion and melancholy mien totted up columns in a ledger.

Seeing that everybody—the melancholy accoun not excepted—favoured her with a gratified stare, concluded the weaker sex were unfrequently emplc here, and trembled with the fear that her application m be refused. She assured herself the Scotchman w never have spoken so confidently of a favourable i if it had not been reasonable to expect it, but doubt having entered her head, it was difficult to di and she began reflecting how she could astonish melancholy one by telling him she was on the brin destitution. The perspiring "packers," sure of dinners by-and-by, looked to her individuals to be citated on their prosperity, and, hopeless young wret as they were, it is a fact that a person's lot is sel so poor but that another person worse off can be fc to envy it. The book-keeper who has grown hag in the firm's employ at a couple of pounds a we the envy of the clerk who lives on eighteen shill and the wight who sweeps the office daily thinks happy he would be in the place of the clerk. urchin who hawks matches in the rain envies sheltered office-boy, and the waif without copper invest envies the match-seller. The grades of m are so infinite, and the instinct of envy is so ingrai that when two vagrants lying under a bridge drawn their belts as tight as they will meet, to still gnawings of their hunger, one of the pair will find s thing to be envious of in the rags of the ou blaspheming at his side.

Messrs. Pattenden's youngster reappeared, and, a yawn so tremendous that it eclipsed his prev effort said:

"Miss Brettan!"

Mr. Collins was seated in a compartment just large enough to contain a desk and two chairs. He signed Mary to the vacant one, and gave her a steady glance of appreciation. A man who had risen to the position of conducting the travelling department of a firm who published on the subscription plan, he was necessarily a reader of temperament; a man who had risen to the position by easy stages while yet young, he was kindly, and had not lost his generosity on the way.

"Good-morning," he said; "what is there I can do for you?"

"I want to represent you with one of your publications," she answered. "Mr. Macpherson was good enough to offer me the introduction, and he thought you would be able to arrange with me." The nervousness was scarcely visible. She had entered well, and spoke without hesitancy, in a musical voice. All these things Mr. Collins noted. Before she had explained her desire he had wished she might have it. The book-agent is of many types, and skilful advertisements hinting at noble earnings, without being explicit about the nature of the pursuit, had brought penurious professional men and reduced gentlewoman on to the chair Mary occupied time and again. But these applicants had generally cooled visibly when the requirements of the vocation were insinuated, and here was one, as refined as any of them, who came comprehending she would have to canvass, and prepared to do it. Mr. Collins nearly rubbed his hands.

"What experience have you had?" he asked.

"In—as an agent? None! But I suppose with

a fair amount of intelligence that is hardly an obstacle?"

"Not at all." For once in his life he was almost at a loss. As a rule it was he who advocated the attempt, and the novice on the chair who grew reluctant.

"I take it," said Miss Brettan, concealing rapture, "that the art of the business is to sell books to people who don't want to buy them? There it is in a nutshell, eh?"

"Precisely; tact, and the ability to talk about your specimen, is what is wanted. Always watch the face of the person you are showing it to, and don't look at the specimen itself. You must know that by heart."

"Oh!"

"Supposing you're showing an encyclopedia: as you turn over the plates, you should be able to tell by his eyes when you have come to one that illustrates a subject he is interested in; then talk about that subject—how fully it is dealt with, etc."

"I see."

"If you think he looks like a married man, and is old enough to have a family, mention how useful an encyclopedia is for general reference in a household, how valuable for children going to school when writing essays and things."

"Are you going to engage me for an encyclopedia?"

He smiled.

"You go ahead, Miss——"

"Brettan. Do I go ahead too quickly?"

"Well, you have to be patient, you know, with pos-

sible subscribers. If you 'rush' so will they, and the easiest reply to give in a hurry is 'No.' I'm not sure about sending you out with the 'Ency'; after a while, perhaps! How would you like trying a new work that has never been canvassed, for a beginning?"

"It would be better?"

"Certainly; there is less in it to learn. And you needn't be afraid of hearing 'Oh, I have one already!'"

"I didn't think of that. What is the new work, Mr. Collins?"

He touched a bell, and ordered the attendant sprite to bring him a specimen of the "Album."

"Four half-volumes at twelve and sixpence each," he said, turning to her, "'The Album of Inventions.' It gives the history of all the principal inventions, with a brief biography of the inventors. You want to know who invented the watch—look it up under W; the telephone—turn to T. It's a history of the progress of science and civilization. 'The origin of the inventions, and the voids they fill,' that's the idea. Ah, here we have it!—Thanks, Saunders.—Now look through that, and tell me if you believe you could do any good with it."

She took a slim crimson-bound book from its case, and found it what he had described.

"I decidedly believe I could," she averred; "I should like to try, anyhow."

"Very well," he returned; "you shall be the first agent to canvass the 'Album' for us."

"And how about terms?" she questioned.

"The terms, Miss Brettan, ought to be to you in a very little while about five or six pounds a week. You

may do more; we have travellers with us who are making their twenty. But for a start say five or six."

"You mean that would be my commencing salary?" she queried calmly.

"No, not as salary," he rejoined, carelessly also; "I mean your commissions would amount to that." From his tone one would have supposed formality obliged him to distinguish between the sources of income, but that it was practically a distinction without a difference. "We allow on every order you bring us for the 'Album' half a guinea. Saturdays you need not go out—it's a bad day, especially to catch professional men, with whom you'll do best with this. But saying you make twelve calls on each of the five others, and out of every dozen calls you book two orders (which experience proves to be the reliable calculation), there is your five guineas a week for you as regular as clockwork. I'll tell you what I'll do: just give me a receipt for the specimen and go home this morning and study it. To-morrow come in to me again at ten o'clock, and every day I'll make out a short list for you of people who have already been subscribers of ours for some work or another. I can pick out addresses that lie close together, and then you'll have the advantage of knowing you are waiting on buyers, and not wasting your time."

"Thank you very much," she said.

"Here is the order-book. You see they have to fill up a form. Every one you bring filled-in means half a guinea to you. You have no further trouble—a deliverer takes the volumes round, and collects the money. Just get the order signed, and your part of the responsibility is over. Is that all right?"

"That's all right."

He rose and shook hands with her.

"At ten o'clock," he repeated. "So long!"

She descended the dirty stairs excitedly. The aspect of the world had changed for her in a quarter of an hour. And to think she would never have dreamt of trying Pattenden's, never have heard of the occupation, if she had not met Mr. Macpherson, had not gone to Finchley, had not been so tired that, having parted with her last penny at the news-room——

The remembrance of her present penury, which the interview had banished, rushed back to her. With five guineas a week coming in directly, she had no money to go on with in the mean while. To walk about the streets all day without even a biscuit between the scanty meals at home would be quite impossible. She questioned desperately what there remained to her to pawn —what she was to do. Gaining her room, she eyed her little bag of linen forlornly; she did not think she could borrow anything on articles like these, neither could she spare any of them, nor summon up the courage to put them on a counter. Suddenly the inspiration came to her that there was the bag itself. The idea disposed of the difficulty, and when it was growing dusk she acted upon it. This time the pawnbroker omitted to inquire if she had a half-penny—people who pledge handbags for four shillings are seldom assumed to have one, and he deducted the cost of the ticket from the amount of the loan. Taking the bull by the horns, she next sought out the landlady, and intimated she would be unable to meet the impending bill on presentation, but would settle that and the next together.

"I have found work," she said, feeling like a housemaid as she made use of the expression. "If you would not mind letting it stand over——"

Mrs. Shuttleworth dried her fingers on her apron, and agreed with less hesitation than her lodger had dreaded.

Convinced that her "specimen" was mastered—she had rehearsed two or three little gusts of eulogy which she was assured would sound spontaneous—Miss Brettan now debated the advisability of calling on the Macphersons to inform them of the result of their suggestion. Fearful of intruding, she had half decided to write a note, but with her limited capital the stamp was an object, and she was, besides, uncertain of the number. Accordingly, she determined on the visit, and at eight o'clock proceeded to make it.

The door was opened by Charlotte, and hastily explaining the motive for the call, Mary followed her inside. She found the parlour in a state of wild confusion, and gathered from the trio in a breath that destiny, in the form of Pilcher's, had ordered that the traveller should be torn from the bosom of his family a full week earlier than the severance had been anticipated.

"He's going to Leeds to-morrow," exclaimed the little woman distractedly, oppressed by an armful of shirts that fell from her one by one as she moved; "and it wasn't till this afternoon we heard a word of it. Oh dear! oh dear!—How many's that, James?"

"'Tis thirty-three," said the traveller, "an', as ye weel ken, it should be thirty-sax! I canna perceive the use o' a body havin' thirty-sax shirts if they can never be found."

"I'm afraid I am in the way," murmured Mary; "I just looked in to say it's all satisfactory, and to tell you how much obliged I am. I won't stop."

"You are not in the way at all.—You've got one on, James: that's thirty-four!—My dear, would you mind counting these shirts for me? I declare my head's going round!"

She held out the bundle feebly in Mary's direction, and, dropping on to her lord and master's box, watched the new-comer's addition with eager eyes, as if she hoped her own arithmetic might be proved at fault.

"Pa has three dozen of 'em," said Charlotte with momentary pride, "'cos of the trouble of getting 'em washed when he goes about so much. I think, though, you lose 'em on the road, pa."

"It's a silly thought that's like ye," returned her parent shortly.—"Young leddy, what dae ye mak' it?"

"There are only thirty-three here," replied Mary, struggling with a laugh, "and—and one is thirty-four!"

"Thirty-three," exclaimed Mr. Macpherson, "and ane is thirty-four! Twa shirts missin', twa shirts at five and saxpence apiece wasted—lost in the washtub through repreheensible carelessness!" He sat down on the box by his wife's side, and contemplated her severely. "Aweel," he said at length, polite under difficulties, "an' Collins was agreeable, ye tell me?"

"He was very nice indeed."

"Hoh!" he sighed, "ye will na mak' a penny by it. But the pursuit may serve tae occupy ye!"

"Not make a penny by it?" she ejaculated in dismay.

"Don't you mind him," said his partner; "he's got the 'ump, that's what's the matter with him."

"It may serve tae occupy your mind," repeated Mr. Macpherson funereally; "'tis pleasant walkin' in the fine weather! Now mind ye, 'oman, I dinna leave withoot ma twa shirts. I canna banish them frae ma memory, an' ye are behoven tae produce them!"

"Bless and save us, James, haven't I rummaged every drawer in the place!"

"I am for ever repleenishing ma wardrobe, an' I am for ever short," he complained; "will ye no' look in the keetchen?"

She was absent some time on this errand, and Charlotte questioned Mary about the details of her interview at Messrs. Pattenden's. She said she knew "Pa had been with them several years," so the business could not be so unprofitable as he had just pretended. Appealed to for support, however, her pa sighed again, and from the disjointed comments he let fall was obviously impelled by circumstances towards an unusually pessimistic view of everything that night. He made brief reference to a "sink o' ineequity," which was regarded as an allusion to the "wine and speerit" trade, and, recognising the futility of attempting a graceful retreat, the visitor got up abruptly and wished them good-bye. Mrs. Macpherson joined her in the passage, empty-handed and disconsolate.

"Good-night, miss," she murmured; "don't be down in the mouth. Have plenty of cheek, and you'll get along like a house afire! As for me, I'm going back to the kitchen, and mean to stop there."

At Mary's third step she called to her to come back.

"Never," she added, "go and settle down with a traveller. You're a likely body to fetch 'em, but don't do it!" She jerked her head towards the parlour impressively. "A good man, my dear, but his shirts were my cross from our wedding-day!"

Mary assured her the warning should be borne in mind, and, expressing a hope that the missing garments might be recovered, left the little person wiping her brow. The remark about her marrying by-and-by, idle as it was, distressed her. Last night also there had been a mention of the possibility, and, knowing she could never be any man's wife, the suggestion shook her painfully. How she had wrecked her life, she reflected, and for a man who had cared nothing for her!

The assertion that he cared nothing for her was bitterer to her soul than the knowledge that she had wrecked her life. To have a love despised is always a keener torture to a woman than to a man; for a woman surrenders herself less easily, thinks the more of what she is bestowing, and counts the treasures at her disposal over and over—ultimately for the sake of delighting in the knowledge of how much she is going to give. If one of the pearls she has laid so reverently at her master's feet is left to lie there, she exonerates him and accuses herself. But his caresses never quite fill the unsuspected wound. If it happens he neglects them all, then that woman, beggared and unthanked, wonders why the sun shines, and how people can laugh. Some women can take back a misdirected love, erase the superscription, and address it over again. Others cannot. Mary could not. She had lain in Seaton's arms and kissed him; pride bade her be ashamed of the

memory; her heart found food in it. It was all over, all terrible, all a thing she ought to shiver and revolt at; but the depth of her devotion had been demonstrated by the magnitude of her sin, and she was not able, because the sacrifice had been misprized, to say, "Therefore in everything except my misery it shall be as if I had never made it."

She could not, continually as she put its fever from her, wrench the tenderness out of her being, recall her guilt, and forget its motive. The sin of her life had been caused by her love, and, come weal, come woe, come gratitude or callousness, a love which had been responsible for such a thing as that was not a sentiment to be plucked out and destroyed at the dictates of common-sense. It was not a thing Carew could kill with baseness. She could have looked him in the face and sworn she hated him; she felt that, whether that were quite true or not, she could at least never touch his hand nor sit in a room with him again. But neither her contempt for him nor for her own weakness could blot out the recollection of the hours of passion, the years of communion, when if one of them had said, "I should like," the other had replied, "Say *we* should!"

It was well for her the exigencies of her situation were supplying anxieties which to a great extent penned her thoughts within more wholesome bounds. On the morrow her chief idea was to distinguish herself on her preliminary excursion. Mr. Collins, true to his promise, had prepared a list for her. The houses were all in the neighbourhood of the Abbey, and mostly, he informed her, the offices of civil engineers. He said civil engineers were a "likely class" to attempt with the

Album," the principal objection to them being that ney were "so beastly irregular in their movements," nd added that when she had "worked Westminster" ie would start her among barristers and clergymen.

"Come in, when you've done, and tell me how you've got on," he said pleasantly. "I suppose you haven't a pocket large enough to hold your specimen? But never mind. Keep it out of sight as much as you can when you ask for people; and ask for them as if you were going to give them a commission to build a bridge."

She smiled confidently, and, allaying the qualms of peddlery with the balm of prospective riches, on which she could always advertise for other employment should this prove so very uncongenial, proceeded to the office marked "1."

It was in Victoria Street, and the name of the individual she was to intrude upon was painted among a host of others on a black board at the entrance. She paused and inspected this board rather longer than was necessary, so that a porter in livery asked her whom she wanted? She told him, "Mr. Gregory Hatch"; to which he replied, "Third floor," evidently with the supposition she would make use of the lift. She profited by this supposition of his, and felt an impostor to commence with. The cognomen of "Gregory Hatch," with initials after it which conveyed no meaning to her, confronted her on a door as the lift-man released her; and with a further decrease of ardour, which she persuaded herself she did not feel, she walked quickly in.

There were several young noblemen masquerading as clerks behind a stretch of mahogany, and, perceiving

her, one of the aristocracy lounged forward, and descended from his high estate sufficiently to inquire, "What can I do for yer?" He said "yer," but that was doubtless part of his excellent masquerade.

"Is Mr. Hatch in?"

"I'll see," said the prince; he looked suspiciously at the specimen, and it began to be heavy. She wished it were outside—in her custody.

"Er, what name?"

"Miss Brettan."

He strolled into the apartment marked "Private," and a sickening certainty that, if she were admitted to it, the prince would be summoned directly afterwards to eject her, made her yearn to take flight before he reappeared. She was positively debating what excuse for a hurried departure she could offer to the rest of the royal family, when the door was re-opened, and he requested her to "step in, please."

An old gentleman of preoccupied aspect was busy at a desk; he and she were alone in the room.

"Miss—Brettan?" he said interrogatively. "Take a chair, madam."

He put his papers down, and waited, she was convinced, for his commission for a bridge. She took the seat he had indicated, because she was too embarrassed to decline it, and immediately felt the act was going to be regarded as an additional piece of impertinence.

"I have called," she stammered—in her rehearsals she had never practised an introductory speech, and she abominated herself for the omission—"I have called Mr. ——" his name had suddenly sailed away from her—"with regard to a book I have been desired to

show you by Messrs. Pattenden. If you will allow me——"

She drew the specimen from the case and deposited it on the desk before him.

She was relieved to find him much less astonished than she had anticipated. He even fingered the thing tentatively, and she began to collect her wits. To take it into her own hands, however, as in duty bound, and expatiate on its merits leaf by leaf, was beyond her, so she soothed her conscience by remarking it was a very nice book, really.

"It seems so," said the old gentleman. "'The Album of Inventions,' dear me! A new work?"

"Quite," she said—"very new!" It sounded idiotic to her to keep repeating how new it was, but she could not think of anything else to say.

"Dear me!" reiterated the old gentleman. He appeared to be growing interested by the examination, and it looked within the regions of possibility that he might give an order. Up to that moment all her ambition had been to find herself in the street again without having been abused.

"The beauty of the work is," she said, "er—that it is so pithy. One so frequently wants to know something that one has forgotten about something: who thought of it, and how the other people managed before he did. I am sure, Mr. Pattenden, that if you——"

"Hatch, madam—my name is Hatch!"

"I beg your pardon," she said—"Mr. Hatch I meant to say! I was about to point out that, should you care to take a copy of it, it is very cheap."

"And what may be the price?" he asked.

"It is in four volumes at twelve and sixpence," answered Mary melodiously.

"The four?"

"Oh no—each! Thick volumes they are; do you think it dear?"

"No," he said; "oh no!—a very valuable book, I have no doubt."

"Then perhaps you will give me an order for it?" she inquired, scarcely able to contain her elation.

"No," he responded sweetly, still perusing an article, "I will not give an order for it; I have so many books."

She stared at him in blank disappointment while he read placidly down to the end of a page.

"There," he said benevolently; "a capital work! It deserves to sell largely; the publishers should be hopeful of it. The plates are bold, and the matter seems to me of a high degree of excellence. The fault I usually condemn in such illustrations is the mistake of making 'pictures' of them, to the detriment of their usefulness, clearness being always the grand desideratum in an illustration of a mechanical contrivance. With this the customary blunder has been avoided; in looking through the specimen I have detected scarcely one instance where I would suggest an alteration. And, though I would not promise," he laughed good-humouredly, "but what on a more careful inspection I might be forced to temper praise with blame, I am on the whole inclined to give the book my hearty commendation."

"But will you buy it?" demanded Miss Brettan.

"No," said the old gentleman, "thank you; I never buy books—I have so many. No trouble at all; I am very pleased to have seen it. Permit me!"

He bowed her out with genial ceremony, and was obviously under the impression he had conferred a favour.

The next gentleman she wanted to see was dead, number 3 had gone on a trial-trip, and the fourth was in South Africa. Number 5, on reference to her paper, proved to be a Mr. Crespigny. His outer office much resembled that of Mr. Hatch, and more scions of nobility did arithmetic behind a counter.

She waited while her name was taken in to him; on Mr. Collins's theory, this, the sixth visit, ought to result in half a guinea to her. She had by now arranged a little overture, and was ready to introduce herself in coherent phrases. Instead of her being ushered inside, however, she was appalled to see Mr. Crespigny come out in the wake of his clerk, and it devolved upon her to explain her business publicly. He was a tall man with a pointed beard, and he advanced towards her in interrogative silence, flicking a cigarette.

"Good-morning," she said diffidently; "Messrs. Pattenden, the publishers, have asked me to wait upon you with a specimen of a new work that——"

Mr. Crespigny deliberately turned his back, and walked to the threshold of his sanctum without a word. Regaining it, it was to the hapless clerk he spoke:

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, "don't you know a book-agent yet when you see one?"

He slammed the door behind him, and, with a sensation akin to having been slapped in the face, she hurried away, burning with mortification. Her cheeks were hot; no retort occurred to her even when she

stood once more on the pavement. She *was* a book-agent, a pest whose intrusion was always liable to be ridiculed or resented according to the bent of the person importuned. Oh, how hateful it was to be poor —"poor" in the fullest meaning of the term; to be compelled to cringe to cads, and swallow insults, and call it wisdom that one showed no spirit! An hour passed before she could nerve herself to make another attempt; Mr. Crespigny had taken all the pluck out of her, and when she repaired to Pattenden's her report was a chronicle of failures.

The exact answers obtained she had in many cases forgotten, and Mr. Collins advised her in future to jot down brief memoranda of the interviews, that he might be able to point out to her where her line of conduct had been at fault.

"Now, that set speech of yours was a mistake," he said. "What you want to do at the start is to get the man's attention, to surprise him into listening. Perhaps he has had half a dozen travellers bothering him already, all trying for an order for something or another, and all beginning the same way. Go in brightly; don't let him know your business till you've got the specimen open under his nose. Cry, 'Well, Mr. So-and-So, here it is, out at last!' Say anything that comes into your head, but startle him at the beginning. He may think you're an idiot, but he'll listen from astonishment, and when you've woke him up you can show him you are not."

"It's so awful," she said dejectedly.

"Awful!" exclaimed Mr. Collins. "Do you know the great Napoleon was a book-agent? Do you know

that when he was a lieutenant without a red cent he travelled with a work called 'L'Histoire de la Révolution'? My dear madam, if you go to Paris you can see, under a glass case in the Louvre, his canvasser's outfit, and the list of orders he succeeded in collaring, by Jove!"

"I don't suppose he liked it," she replied.

"He liked the money it brought in; and you will like yours directly, I'll be bound! You don't imagine I expected you to do any good right off, do you? I should have whistled if you'd come in with any different account this afternoon, I can tell you. No, no, Miss Brettan, you mustn't be disheartened because you aren't lucky to commence with; and as to that Victoria Street fellow who was in a bad temper, what of him! He has to make his living, and you have to make yours; remember you're just as much in your rights as the man you're talking to when you make a call anywhere."

"Very good," said Mary; "if you are satisfied, *I* am. I needn't pretend my services are being clamoured for; and you may be sure I want to succeed with the thing. If by putting my pride in my pocket I can put an income there too, I am ready to do it."

It became a regular feature of her afternoon visit to the publishers' for Mr. Collins to encourage her with prophecies of good fortune, and her anxiety was frequently assuaged by his consideration. On the first few occasions when she returned with her notes of "Out, Out, Doesn't need it, Never reads, Too busy to look," etc., she dreaded the additional chagrin of being rebuked for incompetence, but Mr. Collins was always complaisant, and perpetually assured her she was only enduring disappointments inevitable to a beginner. In

his own mind he began to doubt her fitness for the occupation, but he liked her, and knowing that, in the trade phrase, some orders "booked themselves," was willing to afford her the chance of making a trifle as long as she desired to avail herself of it. They were terrible days to Mary Brettan, wearing away, as they did, without result, while her pitiful store of cash grew less and less; and, considering how drearily long each of them was, it was amazing how quickly the week passed. This is an anomaly especially conspicuous to lodgers, and when her bill was due again she beheld her landlady with despair.

"Mrs. Shuttleworth," she said, "I have done nothing; I hoped to pay you, and I can't. I'm not a cheat, though it looks very much like it; I am agent for a firm of publishers, and I haven't earned a single commission." Mrs. Shuttleworth scrutinized her grimly, and Mary held her breath. She might be commanded to leave, and, omnibus fares being now an item of expenditure, three of the four shillings had been spent. "What do you say?" Mary faltered.

"Well," rejoined the other, "it's like this: I'm not 'ard, and I don't say as I'd care to go and turn a respectable girl into the streets, knowing full well what it is I'd be doing. But I'm a working woman, and I can't afford to lay out for a body's breakfusses and teas with never a farthing coming back for it. Just keep the room a bit, and we'll let the rent stand; but for meals, why I must ask you to get 'em all outside till we're square again."

A lodger on sufferance, the last article on which money could be raised already pawned, and possessed

of a shilling to sustain life until she gained an order for "The Album of Inventions," Mary's wretchedness assumed the acutest form imagination can well conceive. To economize on remaining pounds may be managed with refinement; to be frugal of the last silver is possible with decency; but to be reduced to the depths of pence means a devilish hunger whose cravings cannot be stilled for more than an hour at the time, and a weakness that mounts from limbs to brain until the tears are gathered in the throat, and the eyelids ache from exhaustion. However fatigued her fruitless expeditions might have left her, she now made the journey back to the publishing-house on foot, grudging every penny, husbanding the meagre sum with a tenacity born of deadly fear. The windows of the foreign restaurants with viands temptingly displayed and tastefully garnished, the windows of English ones into which the meats were thrown, enchanted her eye as she would never have believed food could have the power to do. She understood what starvation was, began to understand how people could be brought to thieve by it, and exculpated them for doing so. Without her clothes becoming abruptly shabby, the aspect of the woman deteriorated from her internal consciousness. She carried herself less confidently, she lost the indefinable air that distinguishes the freight from the flotsam on the sea of life. Little things sent the fact home to her. Drivers ceased to lift an inquiring forefinger when she passed a cab-rank, and once, when an address on the list proved to be a private residence, the servant asked her "who from?" instead of "what name?"

Inch by inch she continued to fight for the ground

that was slipping under her, affecting cheerfulness when the specimen was exhibited, and hiding desperation when she restored it, a failure, to its case. The sight of Victoria Street and its neighbourhood came to be loathsome to her; often her instructions took her on to different floors of the same building day after day, and, fancying the hall-porters divined the purpose of her repeated appearances, she entered with the expectation of them forbidding her to ascend the stairs. It was no shock to her at last to issue from the lodging absolutely beggared; she had comprehended so long that the situation was approaching that she accepted its advent almost apathetically. She commenced her duties in the customary manner, toiling up flights of steps, and dragging herself down again, just a shade weaker than usual owing to the absence of her ordinary apology for breakfast, and it was not until one o'clock that the hopelessness of attempting to complete the programme was admitted. Then, the prospect of the walk she must accomplish to reach her room again was intimidating enough, and without delaying the solace any longer, even omitting to return to Pattenden's, she went slowly back, and lay down on the bed, managing to forget her hunger intermittently in snatches of sleep. Towards evening the pangs faded altogether, and were succeeded by a physical and mental prostration in which wholly extraneous matters became invested with lachrymal pathos. Incidents of years ago recurred to her without any effort of the will, impelling her to cry feebly at the recollection of some unkind answer she had once given, at a hurt expression she saw again on her father's face. During the night her troubles were reflected in her

dreams, and at morning she woke pallid and haggard-eyed.

Proceeding to dress, her hands hung so heavily from the wrists that it was labour to make her toilette; but she did not feel hungry, only dazed. She drank a glassful of water from the bottle on the washstand, and, driven to exertion by necessity, took her way to the publishers', moving between the people torpidly, only partially sensible of her surroundings.

On seeing her, Mr. Collins commented on her appearance, and strongly advised her to go home and rest.

"You don't look well at all," he observed with genuine concern. "Stay indoors to-day; you won't do any good if you're seedy."

She smiled wistfully at his belief that remaining indoors would be capable of benefiting her.

"If I lose my 'seediness' it will be by going out," she said. "Give me the list, please, only don't expect me to come in and report; that is more than I shall be equal to."

He wrote a few names in compliance with her desire.

"But I shan't give you many," he declared; "here are half a dozen; try these!"

"Thank you," said Mary Brettan; "I will try these."

She went down and out into the street once more. The rattle of the traffic roared in her ears; the jam and jostle of the pavements confused her. She felt like a child buffeted by giants, and could have thrown up her arms, wailing to God to let the end be now; to allow her to die quickly and quietly, and without much pain.

CHAPTER V.

On the third floor of a house in Delahay Street there used to be an apartment which was at once sitting-room and workshop. A blue plate here and there over the mirror, the shabby armchair on the hearth, and a modest collection of books upon the wall, gave it an air of home. The long white table before the window, littered with plans and paints, and a theodolite in the corner, showed that it served for office too.

A man familiar with that interior had just entered the passage, and as he began to ascend the stairs a smile of anticipated welcome softened the habitual rigidity of his face. He was a tall, loosely-built man, generally credited with five more years than the two-and-thirty he had really seen; a man who, a physiognomist would assert, formed few friendships and was a stanch friend. Possibly it was the gauntness of the countenance that caused him to appear older than he was, possibly its gravity. He did not look as if he laughed readily, as if he saw much in life to laugh at. He did not look impulsive, or emotional, or a man to be imagined singing a song. He could be pictured the one cool figure in a scene of panic with greater facility than participating in the enthusiasm of a grand-stand.

Not that you found his aspect heroic, but that you could not conceive him excited.

He turned the handle as he knocked at the door, and strode into the room without waiting a response. The occupant dropped his T-square with a clatter, giving a quick halloa:

"Philip! great Jupiter! Dear old chap!"

Dr. Kincaid clasped his outstretched hand; there was a grip and a relinquishment. "Oh yes," he said, "it's I; and how are *you?*"

Walter Corri pushed him into the shabby chair, and lounged against the mantelpiece, smiling down upon him.

"How are you?" repeated Dr. Kincaid.

"All right. When did you come up?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Going to stay long?"

"Only a day or two."

"Pipe?"

"Got a cigar; try one!"

"Thanks."

They lighted, and Corri pulled out a chair for himself.

"Well, what's the news?" he said.

"Nothing particular; anything fresh with you?"

"No. How's the mother?"

"Tolerably well; she came up with me."

"Did she! Where are you?"

"Some little hotel. I'm charged with a lot of messages——"

"That you don't remember!"

"I remember one of them: you're to come and see her."

"Thanks, I shall."

"Come and dine to-night, if you've nothing on. We have a room to ourselves, and——"

"And we can jaw! What are you going to do during the day?"

"There are two or three things that won't take very long, but I was obliged to come. What are *you* doing?"

"I've an appointment outside for twelve, but I shall be back in about an hour, and then I could stick a paper on the door without risking an independence."

"You can go about with me?"

"If you'll wait!"

"Good! Where the devil do you keep your matches?"

"Matches 'is off.' Tear up the *Times!*"

"Corri's economy! Throw me the *Times,* then!"

Kincaid ignited his cigar to his satisfaction, and stretched his long legs before the fire. Both men puffed placidly in silence.

"Well," said Corri, breaking it, "and how's the hospital? How do you like it?"

"My mother doesn't like it; she finds it so lonely at home by herself. I expected she'd get used to it in a couple of months—I come round as often as I can—but she complains as much as she did at the beginning. She's taken up the original idea again, and of course it *is* dull for her. And she's not strong, either."

"No, I know, old fellow."

"Tell her I'm going to be a successful man by-and-by, Wally, and cheer her up. It enlivens her to believe it."

"I always do."

"I know you do; whenever she's seen you she looks at me proudly for a week, and tells me what a 'charming young man' Mr. Corri is—'how clever!' The only fault she finds with you is that you haven't got married."

"Is it? Tell her I have what the novelists call an 'ideal.'"

"You interest me," said Kincaid; "when did you catch it?"

"Last year. A fellow I know married the 'Baby.' She was an adoring daughter, and thought all her family unique."

"And—?"

"And my ideal is the blessing who is still unappropriated at twenty-eight. She will have discovered by that time that her mother is not infallible; that her brothers aren't the first living authorities on wines, the fine arts, horseflesh, and the sciences; and that the 'happy home' isn't incapable of improvement. She will, in fact, have grown a little tired of it."

"You have the wisdom of a relieved widower."

"I have seen," said Corri widely. "The fellow, you know. Married fellows are an awfully 'liberal education.' This one has been turned into a nurse—among the several penalties of his selection. The 'treasure' is for ever dancing on to wet pavements in thin shoes, and sandwiching imbecilities between colds on the chest. He swears you may move the Himalayas sooner than teach a girl of twenty to take care of herself. He told me so with tears in his eyes. I am resolved to be older than my wife, and she has got to be twenty-eight, so it

is necessary to wait a few years. I may be able to support her, too, by then; that's another thing in favour of delay."

"Yes, it looks an advantage. I'll represent the matter in the proper light for you on the next occasion."

"Do; it's a most extraordinary fact that every woman advocates matrimony for every man excepting her own son."

"She makes up for it by her efforts on behalf of her own daughter."

"Is that from experience?"

"Not in the sense you mean; I'm no 'catch' to be chased myself, but I've seen enough to make you sick. The friends see the ceremonies, I see the sequels."

"'There are worse occupations in this world than feeling a woman's pulse.' But Yorick was an amateur! I should say a horrid profession, in one way; it can't leave a scrap of illusion. What's a complexion to a man who knows all that's going on underneath! I suppose when a girl gives a blush you see a sort of map of her muscles, and remember what produces it."

"I knew a physician who used to declare he'd never cared for any woman who had not a fatal disease," replied Kincaid— "how does that go with your theory? She was generally consumptive, I believe."

"Do you understand it?"

"Pity, I dare say, first. Doctors are men!"

"Yes, I suppose they are; only one thinks of them, somehow, as machines. Between the student and the doctor there's such an enormous gap; we know the one is a development of the other, but, then, who recollects the chrysalis when he looks at the butterfly? That's

bad, 'butterfly' and 'machine,' great Scott! You know what I mean, though: in both cases the earlier stage is forgotten. It's a stupid idea, but one's apt to feel that a doctor must marry, as he goes to church on Sunday, because the performance is respectable and expected. Some professions don't make any difference to the man himself; you don't think of an engineer as being different from anybody else; but with medicine——"

"It's true," said Kincaid, "that hardly anybody but a doctor can realize how a doctor feels; his friends don't know. The only writer who ever drew one was George Eliot."

"If you're a typical——"

"Oh, I wasn't talking about myself; don't take me. When a man's thoughts mean worries, he acquires the habit of keeping them to himself very soon; that is, if he isn't a fool. It isn't calculated to make him popular, but it prevents him becoming a bore."

"Out comes your old bugbear, 'bore, bore, bore!' Isn't it possible for you to believe a man's friends may listen to his worries without being bored, Kincaid?"

"How many times?"

"Oh damn, whenever they're there!"

"No," said Kincaid meditatively, "it isn't. They'd hide the boredom, of course, but he ought to hide the worries. Let a man do his cursing in soliloquies, and grin when it's conversation."

"Would it be convenient to mention exactly what you do find it possible to believe in?"

"In work and grit and Walter Corri! In doing your honest best in the profession you've chosen for the sake of the profession, not in the hope of what it's going to

do for you. You can't quite, that's the devil of it! Your own private ambitions *will* obtrude themselves sometimes; but they're only vanity, when all's said and done—just meant for the fuel. What does nine out of ten men's success do for anyone but the nine men? Leaving out the great truths, the discoveries that benefit the human race for all time, what more good does a man effect in his success than he did in his obscurity? Who wants to see him succeed, excepting perhaps his mother—who's dead before he does it? Who's the better for his success? who does he think will be any better for it? Nobody but No. 1! Then, whenever the vanity's sore and rubbed the wrong way, you'd have him go to his friends and 'take it out' of them. What a selfish beast!"

"Bosh!" said Corri. "Oh, I know it isn't argument, but 'bosh!'"

"My dear fellow——"

"My dear fellow, you had a rough time of it yourself for any number of years, and——"

"And they've left their mark. Very naturally! What then?"

"Simply that now you want to stunt all humanity in the unfortunate mould that was clapped on *you*. You comprehend the right of every pain to shriek expelling mental pain. You'd sit up all night pitying the whimpers of a child with a splintered finger, but if a man made a moan because his heart was broken, you'd call him what was it?—a 'selfish beast'!"

Kilmaid ejected a circlet of smoke, and watched it sail away before he answered.

"'Weak,'" he said, "I think I should call that

'weak.' It was a very good sentence, though, if not quite accurate. This reminds me of old times; it takes me back ten years to sit in your room and have you bully me. There's something in it, Corri; circumstances are responsible for a deuce of a lot, and we're all of us accidents. I'm a bad case, you tell me; I dare say it's true. You're a good chap to put up with me."

"Don't be a fool!" said Corri.

The "fool" stared into the coals, nursing his big knee. He seemed to be considering the accusation of his chum.

"When I was sixteen," he said, nursing the knee still, and still contemplating the fire, "I was old. In looking back, I never see any transition from childhood to maturity. I was a kid, and then I was a man. I was a man when I went to school; I never had larks out of hours; I went there understanding I was sent to learn as much and as quickly as I could. Then from school I was put into an office, and was a man who had to conceal what he felt already: my people knew I wanted to make this my profession, and they couldn't afford it. If I had let the poor old governor see . . . well, he didn't see; I affected contentment, I said a clerkship was 'rather jolly.' Good Lord! I said it was 'jolly'! The abasement of it! The little hypocritical cur it makes of you, that life, where a gape is regarded as a sign of laziness, and you're forced to hide the natural thing behind an account-book or the lid of your desk; when the knowledge that you mustn't lay down your pen for five minutes under your chief's eyes teaches you to sneak your leisure when he turns his back, and to simulate uninterrupted industry at the

sound of his return. With the humbug, and the 'Yes, sirs' and the 'No, sirs,' you're a schoolboy over again as a clerk, excepting that in an office they pay you, and at school you pay them!"

"My clerk has yet to come!" said Corri, grimacing.

"Yes, he's being demoralized somewhere else! How I thanked God one night when my father told me if I hadn't out-grown my desire he could manage to gratify it—*how* I thanked Him! The words positively took me out of hell. But when I did become a student I couldn't help having the consciousness that to study was an extravagance. It was with me all the time, reminding me of my responsibility, although it wasn't until the governor died that I knew how great an extravagance it must have appeared to him; and I never 'spreed' with the fellows as a student any more than I had enjoyed myself with the lads in the playground. Altogether, I can scarcely be said to have 'rollicked,' Corri. By heaven! such youth as I have had has been snatched at between troubles."

"Poor old beggar!"

Kincaid smiled quickly.

"There's more feeling in 'you poor old beggar!'" he said, "than in a letter piled up with condolence. It's hard lines one can't write 'poor old beggar' to every acquaintance who has a bereavement!"

The momentary passion that had crept into his strong voice while speaking of his earlier life to the one person in the world to whom he could have brought himself to speak so had been instantly repressed, and his tone was again the impassive one that was second-nature to him.

"Believe me," he said, harking back after a pause, "that idea of the medical profession, that 'respectable and expected' idea of yours, is quite wrong. Oh, it isn't yours alone, it's common enough: every little comic paragraphist thinks himself justified in turning out a certain number of ignorant jokes at the profession's expense in the course of the year; every twopenny-halfpenny caricaturist has to thank us for a certain number of his dinners. No harm's intended, and nobody minds; but people who actually know something of the subject that these 'funny men' are so constant to can tell you there's more nobility and self-sacrifice in the medical profession than in any under the sun, not excepting the Church. Yes, and more hardships too! The chat on the weather, and the fee for remarking it's a fine day, has little foundation in fact; the difficulty is to get the fees in return for loyal attendance. Nobody is reverenced like the family doctor in time of sickness. In the days of their child's recovery the parents love the doctor almost as fervently as they do the child; but the fervour's got cold when Christmas comes, and the gratitude's forgotten. And they know a doctor can't dun them; so he has to wait for his account, and pretend the money's of no consequence when he bows to them, though the butcher and the baker and the grocer don't pretend to him, but look for his own indebtedness to be settled every week. I could give you instances——"

He gave instances. Corri spoke of difficulties, too. They smoked their cigars to the stumps in discussion, branching from one theme to another, talking leisurely until Corri declared that he must go.

"In an hour, then, I'll call back for you," said Kincaid; "you won't be longer?"

"I don't think so. But why not wait? You can make yourself comfortable; there's plenty of the *Times* left to read."

"I will. I shan't read, though; I want to write a couple of letters—can I?"

"There's a desk, and a chair in front of it. Have I got everything?—let me see. Yes, that's all. Well, I'll hurry up, but if I should be detained I shall find you here all right?"

"You will find me here," said Kincaid, "don't be alarmed."

The other's retirement did not send him to his correspondence immediately, however. Left alone, it was manifest how used the man had been to living alone. It was manifest in his composure, in his deliberation, in the earnestness he devoted to the task when he at length attacked it. He had just reached the foot of the second page when somebody knocked at the door.

"Come in," he said abstractedly.

The knock was repeated. It occurred to him that Corri had omitted to provide for this contingency of patients, or clients, or whatever he called his people, coming to bother during his absence, and that he would not know what to say to them. "Come in!" he cried more loudly, and not without a sense of annoyance at the interruption.

He glanced over his shoulder, and saw the intruder was a woman carrying something. What did she want?

"Mr. Corri?"

"Mr. Corri's not in," he replied, fingering the pen; "he'll be back by-and-by."

Mary lingered irresolutely. Her temples throbbed, and in her weakness the sight of a chair magnetized her.

"Shall I wait?" she murmured; "perhaps he won't be very long?"

"Eh?" said Kincaid. "Oh, wait if you like, madam."

She sank into a seat mutely. The response had not sounded encouraging, but it permitted her to rest, and rest was what she yearned for now. How indifferent the world was! how mercilessly little anybody cared for anybody else! "Wait, if you like, madam" —go and die, if you like, madam—go and lay your bones in the gutter, madam, if you like, and so long as you don't trouble me! She watched the big hand hazily as it shifted to and fro across the paper. The man probably had money in his pocket that signified nothing to him, and to her it might have been salvation. He lived in comfort while she was starving; he did not know that she was starving, but how much would it affect him if he did know? She wondered if she could tempt him to give an order for the book: he was just as likely to be a purchaser as the other one, perhaps; if so, she would take a cab back to Mr. Collins and ask him for her commission at once, and go and get something to eat—should she be able to eat any longer.

She roused herself with an effort, and crossed the room to where he sat:

"I came to see Mr. Corri from Messrs. Pattenden,"

she faltered, "about a new work they're publishing. I have brought a specimen—If I am not disturbing you——?"

She put it down as she spoke, and stood a pace or two behind him, watching the effect.

"Is this woman very nervous?" said Kincaid to himself. "So she's a book-agent, is she? I thought she had something to sell. Good Lord, what a life!"

"Thanks," he answered. "I'm very busy just now, and I never buy my books on the subscription plan."

"You could have it sent in to you when it's complete," she suggested.

He drummed his fingers on the title-page. "I don't want it."

"Perhaps Mr. Corri?"

"I really can't speak for Mr. Corri, but don't wait for him, on my advice; I'm afraid it would be patience wasted."

He shut the "Album" up, intimating he had done with it; but the woman made no movement to withdraw it, and he invited this movement by pushing the thing aside. He drew forward the blotting-pad preparatory to resuming his letter; and then she did not offer to remove her obnoxious "specimen" from the desk. He was beginning to feel irritated.

"If you choose to wait, madam, take a seat," he said. "I say take——"

He turned, questioning her continued silence, and sprang to his feet in dismay. The book-agent's head was falling on her bosom, and his arm—extended to support her—was only out in time to catch her as she fell.

CHAPTER VI.

"Now," said Kincaid, when she opened her eyes at length, "what's the matter with you? No nonsense; I'm a doctor; you mustn't tell lies to me! What's the matter with you?"

There are some things a woman cannot say; this was one of them.

"You are very exhausted?"

"Oh," she said weakly, "I—just a little."

"When had you food last?"

She gave no answer. He scrutinized her persistently, noting her hesitation, and shot his next question straight at the mark.

"Are you hungry?"

The eyes closed again, and her lips quivered.

"Boor!" he exclaimed to himself, "she's starving, and you wouldn't buy her book! Beast! she's starving, and you tried to turn her out!"

But his sympathy was hardly communicated by his voice; indeed, in her shame she thought him rather rough.

"You stop here a minute," he continued; "don't you go and faint again, because I forbid it. I'm going to order a prescription for you. Your complaint isn't incurable; I've had it myself!"

He left her in quest of the housekeeper, a flustered little body he unearthed in the basement, and whom he interrogated on the subject of eggs and coffee.

"Have you got anybody you can send out for some?" he demanded. "Hot coffee, mind you—no slops. There's a place close by; is there anybody here who can run?"

She admitted feebly to the existence of a "gal."

"Will that girl run if I make her a present of a shilling?"

The flustered one opined that, stimulated by a shilling, the triumphs of Achilles himself would fall short of the achievements of the "gal."

"Very well," he said. "Here you are; now pack her off. Mr. Corri's room; hurry!"

He went back and found his patient sitting in the armchair. He observed there were tear-stains on her cheek, though she turned away her face at his approach.

"The prescription's being made up," he said. "Would you like the window shut again? No? All right, we'll keep it open. Don't talk if you'd rather not; there isn't the slightest occasion; I know everything you could say just as well as *you* do!"

He ignored her ostentatiously until the tray appeared, and then, receiving it at the doorway, brought it across to her himself.

"Come," he said, "try that—slowly."

"Oh!" she murmured, shrinking.

"Don't be silly; do as I tell you. There's nothing to be bashful about. I know you're not an angel; your having an appetite doesn't astonish me a bit."

"How good you are!" she muttered; "what must you think of me?"

"Eat," commanded Kincaid; "ask me what I think of you afterwards."

She was evidently in no danger of committing the mistake he had looked for—his difficulty was not to restrain her, but to persuade; nor was her reluctance the outcome of embarrassment alone.

"It has gone," she said, shaking her head; "I am really not hungry now."

He encouraged her till the plunge had been taken, and then retired behind the newspaper to distress her as little as might be by his presence. At the expiration of a quarter of an hour he put the *Times* down. The eggshells were empty, and he stretched himself and addressed her:

"Better?"

"Much better," she said, with a ghost of a smile.

"Have you been having a long experience of this sort of thing?"

"N—no," she returned nervously, "not very."

He caressed his moustache; she was ceasing to be a patient and becoming a woman, and he did not quite know what he was to do with her. Somehow, despite her situation, the offer of a sovereign looked as if it would be coarse. Mary divined his dilemma, and made as if to rise.

"Sit down," he said authoritatively; "when you're well enough to go I'll tell you; till I do, stay where you are."

She felt that she ought to say something, proffer some explanation, but was at a loss how to begin. There was a pause, and then:

"Is there any likelihood of this business of yours improving?" inquired Kincaid. "Supposing you were able to hold out, would there be anything to look forward to?"

"No," she said; "I don't believe there would be anything whatever to look forward to. I'm afraid I am not adapted to it."

"Was it an attractive career, that you made the attempt?"

"Not in the least attractive, but it seemed a chance."

"And the chances are not many; I see."

He saw also she was a gentlewoman fitted for more refined pursuits. How had she reached this pass? he wondered. Would she volunteer the information, or should he ask her? He failed to perceive what assistance he could render if he knew; and yet if he did not help her she would go away and die, and he would know she was going away to die as he let her out.

"I was introduced to the firm by a very old connection of theirs. I was at my wits' end to find something to do, and he fancied that as I was—well, that as I was a lady—it sounds rather odd under the circumstances to speak of being a lady, doesn't it!—"

"I don't see anything odd about it," he said. "Go on!"

"He fancied I might do rather well at it. But I think it's a drawback to me, on the contrary. Being unaccustomed to the kind of work, it's not easy to decline to take 'No' for an answer, and nobody can do any good in a vocation she is ashamed of."

"But you shouldn't be ashamed," he responded; "it's honest trade."

"That's what the manager tells me. Only when a woman has to go into a stranger's office and bother him, and be snubbed for her pains, the honesty of it doesn't prevent her feeling uncomfortable. You must have thought me a nuisance yourself."

"I fear I was rather brusque," he said quickly. "I was busy; I hope I wasn't rude?"

Her colour rose.

"I didn't mean that at all," she stammered; "I shouldn't be very grateful to remind you of it if you had been."

"I should have imagined a book of that sort would have been tolerably easy to sell, now; it's an uncommonly useful work of reference. What is the price?"

"Two pounds ten altogether. It isn't dear, but the people won't buy it, all the same."

"Yes, it's got up well," he said, taking it from the desk and turning over the leaves; "how many volumes did you say?"

"Four."

She made a little tentative movement towards the specimen to recover it, but he went on with his examination as if the gesture had escaped him.

"If it's not too late in the day I'll change my mind and subscribe for a copy," he declared. "Put my name down, please, will you?"

She clasped her hands tightly in her lap.

"No," she said, "thank you, I would rather not."

"Not?"

"No," she faltered; "you don't want the book, I know you don't. You have fed me and done enough for me already; I won't take your money, too; I can't!"

Her bosom began to swell tempestuously. He saw by the widened eyes she fixed upon the fire that she was struggling to repress a recurrence of crying.

"There," he said gently, "don't break down; let's talk about something else."

"Oh!"—she sneaked a tear away—"I am not used —don't think——"

"No, no," he said, "*I* know, *I* understand! Poke that for me, will you? let's have a blaze."

She took the poker up, and prolonged the task a minute while she hung her head.

Remarked Kincaid:

"It's awful to be hard up, isn't it? nobody can appreciate it but by experience. I've been through all the stages; it's abominable!"

"*You* have?" she said.

"Oh yes, I know all about it. So I don't tell you that 'money's the least thing.' Only the people who have always had enough say that."

"One wants so little in the world to relieve anxiety," said Mary; "it does seem cruel that so few can get sufficient to know ease."

"What do you call 'ease'?"

"'Ease?' I should call employment 'ease' now."

"How did you interpret the term once, then?"

"I used to be more exacting once—more foolish, perhaps I ought to say. 'Experience teaches fools.'"

"Pardon me," said Kincaid, "experience teaches intelligent people; the fools go on blundering to the end. 'Once——?'—I interrupted you."

"Well, it used to mean a home of my own, and relations to care for me, and money enough to settle the

bills without minding if the total came to five shillings more than had been foreseen. It's a beautiful regulation that the less we have the less we want, only sometimes the supply dwindles to the proportions of the horse's one straw, and that's too fine a point to cut our requirements down to."

"How did you come to this thing?" asked Kincaid suddenly; "couldn't you get different work before the last straw?"

"If you knew how I tried!" she said. "I haven't any friends here; that was my difficulty. A friendless woman—who will hear her! I wanted a situation as companion, but I had to give the idea up at last, and it ended by my going to Pattenden's. Don't think they know—I mean, don't imagine they guess the straits I'm in: that would be unfair. They have been very kind to me."

"You have never been a 'companion,' I suppose?"

"No; but I hoped to get such a post, for all that. Everything has to be done for the first time at some period. All the adepts were novices once."

"That's true enough, but there are so many adepts in everything to-day that there is no chance for the novices to be trusted."

"Then how are they to qualify?"

"That's the novices' affair. You can't expect people to pay incompetence when skilled labour is loafing at the street corners."

"I expect nothing," she answered dejectedly; "my expectations are all dead and buried. We are only furnished with a certain capacity for expectation, I think; under favourable conditions it wears well, and

we say, 'While there's life there's hope;' but if it's taxed too severely it gives out before the life, and we accept occurrences without anticipating at all."

"And you drift without a fight in you?"

"A woman can't do more than fight until she is beaten."

"She shouldn't acknowledge to being beaten."

"Theory," she said between her teeth; "the breakfast-tray is fact."

"What do you reckon is going to become of you?"

"'Without anticipating at all,'" she repeated doggedly.

"Oh, that's all rubbish! Give me a straight reply; what *do* you?"

"I shall starve, then," she said, "and be laid by the side of my expectations."

"Sss! You know it?"

"I know it, and I am resigned to it. If I were not resigned to it, it would be much harder. There is nothing that can happen to provide for me; there isn't a soul in the world I can—'will,' to be accurate—appeal to for help. You have delayed it a little by your kindness, but you can't prevent it coming. Oh, I have hoped and struggled till I am worn out!" she went on, her voice shaking. "If there were a prospect, I could rouse myself, weak as I am, to gain it; but there isn't a prospect, not the glimmer of a prospect! I'm not cowardly; I am only rational. I admit what is; I have finished duping myself."

She could express her despair, this woman; she had education and manner. He contemplated her attentively; she interested him very strongly.

"You speak like a fatalist, nevertheless," he said to her.

"I speak like a woman who has reached the lowest rung of destitution, and been fed on charity. I—oh, don't, *don't* keep forcing me to make a child of myself like this; let me go! Perhaps you are quite right—things will improve!"

"You shall go presently; not yet—not till I say you may!"

There was silence between them once more. He lay back, with his hands thrust deep into his trouser-pockets and his feet crossed, pondering.

"You weren't brought up to anything, of course," he said abruptly, "never been trained to anything? You can't do anything, or make anything, that has any market value?"

"I lived at home."

"And now you're helpless! What rot it is! why didn't your father teach you to use your hands?"

"I think you said you were a doctor?" she returned, lifting her head.

"Eh? Yes, my name is Dr. Kincaid."

"My father's was Dr. Anthony Brettan; he never expected his daughter would be in such extremity."

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "Was your father one of us? I'm glad to make your acquaintance. Is it 'Miss Brettan'?"

She bowed affirmatively, warming with an impulse to go further, and cry, "Also I have been a sick-nurse: you are a doctor, can't you get me something to do?" But if she did he would require corroboration, and, in the absence of her certificate, institute inquiries at the

hospital, and then the whisper would circulate that "Brettan was no longer living with her husband"—they would speedily ascertain he had not died—and from that point to the truth would be the veriest step. "Never married at all—the disgrace! Of course, an actor, but fancy *her!*" She could see their faces, the astonishment of their contempt. Narrow circle as it was, it had been her world, and she could not do it.

"But surely, Miss Brettan," he said, "there must be someone who can serve you a little—someone among the friends of your father who can put you in the way of an occupation?"

Immediately she regretted having proclaimed as much as she had.

"My father lived very quietly, and socially he was hardly what is called a popular man. For several reasons I would not have his daughter's distress suspected by the people who knew him."

"Those people are your credentials, though," he urged; "it seems you can't afford to turn your back on them. If you will be guided by advice, you will swallow your pride."

"I couldn't; I made the resolve to stand alone, and I shall not swerve from it. Besides, you are wholly wrong in supposing any one of them would exert himself for me to any extent if I did. My father did not have—was not intimate enough with anybody for my plight to excite anything more useful than gossip."

A difficult woman to aid, thought Kincaid pityingly. A notion had flashed across his brain at her allusion to the kind of employment she had desired, which the announcement of her parentage was strengthening. But

there must be something to go upon, something more than mere assertion.

"If a post turned up, whom do you leave yourself to refer to?"

"Messrs. Pattenden; I believe they would speak for me willingly."

"Anybody else?"

"Only the firm; but the manager would see anybody who went to him about me, I am almost sure."

"You need friends, you know," he said; "you are very awkwardly placed without any."

"Oh, I do know," she rejoined, "to have no friends is a crime; one is totally helpless without them, and a woman's helplessness is the best of reasons why no help should be extended to her. But it sounds a merciless argument, doctor, horribly merciless, at the beginning!"

"It's a merciless life!" he retorted. "Look here, Miss Brettan, I don't want to beat about the bush: you're in a beastly hole, and if I can pull you out of it I shall be glad—for your own sake, and for the sake of your dead father. It's like this, though: the only thing I can see my way to involves the comfort of someone else. You were talking about a place as 'companion'; I can't live at home now, and my mother wants one."

"Doctor!"

She caught her breath.

"If I were to take the responsibility of recommending you, it's probable she'd engage you. I think you'd suit her, but—well, it's rather a large order!"

"Oh, you should never be sorry!" she cried. "You shall never be sorry for trusting me, if you will!"

"You see, it's not very easy. It's a somewhat irre-

gular proceeding to go engaging a lady one meets for the first time."

"Why, you would not meet anybody else oftener," she pleaded eagerly; "if you advertised, you would take the woman after the one interview. You wouldn't exchange a lot of visits and get friendly before you engaged her."

He pulled at his moustache again.

"But of course she would not—would not be starving," she added; "she would not have fainted in your room. It would be no more judicious, but it would be so much more conventional."

"You argue neatly," he said with a smile.

The smile encouraged her. She smiled response. He could not smile if he were going to refuse her, she felt.

"Dr. Kincaid——" she said.

"One minute," he interposed; "I hear someone coming, I think; excuse me!"

It was Corri; he met him as he turned the handle, and drew him outside.

"There's a woman in there," he said, "and a breakfast-tray, and confusion generally. Come down on to the next landing; I want to speak to you."

"What on earth——" said Corri. "Are you giving a party? What do you mean by a woman and a breakfast-tray? Did the woman bring the breakfast-tray?"

"No, she brought a book. Don't laugh; it's serious."

They leant over the banisters conferring, while Mary, in the armchair, remained trembling with suspense. The vista opened by Kincaid's words had shown her how tenaciously she still clung to life, how passionately she

would clutch at a chance of prolonging it. Awhile ago her one prayer had been to die speedily; now, with a possibility of rescue dangled before her eyes, her prayer was only for the possibility to be fulfilled. Would he be satisfied, or would he send her away? Her fate hung on his decision. She did not marvel at her tenacity; it seemed to her so natural she did not question it at all. Yet it is of all things the oddest—the love of living which the most life-worn preserve in their hearts. Every day they long for sleep, and daily the thought of death alarms them—terrifies their inconsistent souls, though few indeed believe there is a hell, and everybody who is good enough to believe in heaven believes also that he is good enough to go to it.

"O God," she whispered, "let him take me! Forgive me what I did, and make me a good woman! Don't let me suffer any more, God! You know how I loved him when I sinned—how I loved him!—how I lo-ve-d——"

"Well," demanded Corri on the landing, "and what are you going to do?"

"I'm thinking," Kincaid answered, "of letting my mother go to see her."

"It's wildly philanthropic, isn't it?"

"It looks wild, of course." He mused a moment. "But, after all, one knows where she comes from: her father was a professional man; she herself is palpably a lady."

"What was her father's name, again?"

"Brettan—Anthony."

"Ever heard it before?"

"One can discover it in five minutes if there wasn't

such a person! Besides, my mother would have to decide for herself. I should recount the whole affair, and if an interview left her content, why——"

"*Enfin!*" said Corri. "Go and pronounce the ukase! You'll find me on the bed. By the way, if, without offending the damsel, you could hand my pipe out, I should take it as a favour!"

"I can't; you've smoked enough, too. Wait! here's a last cigar; go and console yourself with that!"

Kincaid returned to the room, but as yet he was not certain he meant to pronounce the ukase. Mary looked up anxiously, scanning his countenance, and striving to divine by its expression the result of the consultation on the stairs. The person consulted was Mr. Corri, she concluded, the man she had been sent to importune. Old or young? easy-going or morose? On which side had he cast the weight of his opinion—this man she had never seen?

"We were talking about the companion's place, Miss Brettan," began Kincaid. "Now, what do you say?"

Instantly she glowed with gratitude to the unknown personage, who, in reality, had done nothing.

"Never," she insisted, "never should you regret it, Dr. Kincaid, I promise you!"

"Understand, I couldn't guarantee the engagement in any case," he said hastily. "The most I could do would be to mention the matter; the rest would depend on my mother's own feelings."

"I should be just as thankful to you if she objected. Don't think I under-estimate my drawbacks—I know that for you even to consider engaging me is generous. But—— Oh, I would do my best!—I would indeed!

The difficulty is as clear to me as to you," she went on rapidly. "I see it every bit as plainly. See it! I've seen it again and again. It has barred me from employment time after time! I am a stranger, I cannot furnish credentials; I can only look you in the face and say: 'I have told you the truth; if I were able to follow your advice and pocket my pride, I could *prove* that I have told you the truth'; and what is that?—anybody might say it and be lying! Oh yes, I know!—I know! Doctor, my lack of proper references has made me suspected till I could have cried blood. Doors have closed on me, not because I was ineligible in myself, but because I was a lady who had not had employers to declare, 'I found her a satisfactory person.' Posts which might have been given to me with alacrity have been offered to other women because they had papers to substantiate their accounts of themselves, and I had not. At the beginning I imagined my tones would carry conviction with them. I thought I could say: 'Honestly, conscientiously, this tale is true,' and someone—one in a dozen, perhaps, one in a score—would be found to credit it. What a mistake it was I soon discovered! The absurdity of hoping to be believed! Why, in all London, in the length and breadth of the earth, there is no creature so forsaken as the gentleman's daughter without friends. The servant, the drudge, may be taken on trust; the woman who is educated—never!"

"She may sometimes," said Kincaid. "Hang it! it isn't so bad as all that. What *I* can do for you I will. Very likely my mother will call on you this afternoon. Whereabouts are you staying?"

A hansom had just discharged a fare at one of the opposite houses, and he hailed it from the window.

"The best thing you can do now is to go home and rest, and try not to worry. Cheer up, and hope for the best, Miss Brettan—care killed a cat!"

She swallowed convulsively.

"That is the address," she said. "God bless you, Dr. Kincaid!"

He led the way down to the passage, and put her into the cab. It was, perhaps, superfluous to show her that he remembered cabs were beyond her means, yet she might be harassed during the drive by a dread of the man's demand, and he paid him so that she should see.

The occurrence had swelled his catalogue of calls. He told Corri they had better drop in at Guy's, and glance at a medical directory; but in passing a second-hand bookstall they noticed an old copy exposed for sale, and examined that. He encountered Anthony Brettan's name in the provincial section with a certain gladness, for it would have hurt him to find this woman had deceived him, and, moreover, remarked that Brettan had been a student of his own college.

"'Brettan' is going up!" he observed cheerfully. "Now step it, my son!"

Mary's arrival at the lodging was an event of local interest. Mrs. Shuttleworth stood at the door conversing with a neighbour, and watched her descend agape. Two children playing on the pavement suspended their operations in dumb amaze. She told Mrs. Shuttleworth a lady might ask for her during the day, and, mounting to the garret, shut herself in to wrestle unsuccess-

fully with her fears of being refused or forgotten altogether. Would this mother come or not? If not—she shivered; she had been so near to ignominious death the smell of it had reached her nostrils—if not, the devilish gnawing would be back again directly, and the faint sick craving would follow it; and then there would be a fading of consciousness for the last time, and they would talk about her as "it," and be afraid. Faugh!

But the mother did come. It seemed so wonderful that, even when she sat beside her in the attic, and everything was progressing favourably, Mary could scarcely realize that it was true. She came, and the engagement was concluded. There are some women who are essentially women's women; Mary was one of them. Mrs. Kincaid, who came already interested, sure her Philip could make no mistake, and wishful to be satisfied, was charmed with her. The pleading tones, the repose of manner, the—for so she described it later—"Madonna face," if they did not go "straight to her heart," mightily pleased her fancy. And of course Mary liked her—what more natural! She was gentle of voice, she had the softest blue eyes that ever beamed mildly under white hair, and—culminating attraction—she obviously liked Mary.

"I'm a lonely old woman," she said, "now my son's been appointed medical officer at the hospital. It'll be very quiet for you, but you'll bear that, won't you? I do think you'll be comfortable with me, and I'm certain I shall want to keep you."

"Quiet for me!" said Mary. "Oh, Mrs. Kincaid, you speak as if you were asking a favour of me, but

your son must have told you that—what—I suppose he saved my life."

"That's his profession," answered the old lady brightly; "that's what he had to learn to do."

"Ah, but not with hot breakfasts!" Mary smiled. "I accept your offer gratefully; I will come as soon as you like."

"Can you manage to go back with us the day after to-morrow? Don't if it inconveniences you; but if you can be ready——"

"I can; I shall be quite ready."

"Good girl!" said Mrs. Kincaid. "Now you must let me advance you a small sum, or—I dare say you have things to get—perhaps we had better make it this. Tush! it's your own money, not a present; there's nothing to thank me for. Good-afternoon, Miss Brettan; I will write letting you know the train."

"This" was a five-pound note. When she was alone again Mary picked it up, and smoothed it out, and quivered at the crackle. These heavenly people! their tenderness, their consideration! Oh, how beautiful it would be if they knew all about her, and there were no reservation! She did wish she could have revealed all—they had been so nice and kind!

She sought out the landlady and paid her debt—the delight she felt in paying her debt!—intimating she would be giving up her room after the next night. She went forth to a little foreign restaurant in the Gray's Inn Road, where she dined wholesomely and well, treating herself to cutlets, bread-crumbed and brown, and bordered with tomatoes, to pudding and gruyère, and a cup of black coffee, all for eighteenpence, after feeing

ıe waiter. She returned to the attic—glorified attic! it ⁄ould never appal her any more—and abandoned her- elf to meditating upon the "things." There was this, ınd there was that, and there was the other. Yes, and she must have a box. She would have had her initials painted on the box, only the paint would look so curiously new. Should she have her initials on it? No, she decided that she would not. Then there were her watch and bag to be redeemed at the pawnbroker's, and she must bid good-bye to Mr. Collins. What a busy day would be the morrow! what a dawn of new hope, new peace, new life! Her anxieties were left be- hind; before her lay shelter and rest. Yet on a sudden the pleasure faded from her features, and her lips twitched painfully.

"Tony!" she murmured.

She stood still where she had risen. A sob, a second sob, a torrent of tears! She was on her knees beside the bed, gasping, shuddering, crying out on God and him:

"O Tony, Tony, Tony!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE sun shone brightly when she met Mrs. Kin at Euston. The doctor was there, loose-limbed bony, lounging by his mother's side. He shook M hand, and remarked it was a nice day for travel She had been intending to eject some phrase of g tude on greeting him, but his manner did not invi so she attempted to throw her thanks into a look stead. She suffered at first from slight embarrassn not knowing if she should take her own ticket, nor assistance was expected of a "companion" at a rail station. Perhaps she ought to select the compartn and superintend the labelling of the luggage. Fortun the luggage was not heavy, her own being by far larger portion, and the tickets, she learnt dire Dr. Kincaid had already procured.

Her employer lived in Westport, a town Mary never visited, and a little conversation sprang intc from her questions concerning it. She did not much—she spoke very diffidently, in fact, the consc ness that she was being paid to talk and be enter ing weighting her tongue. She was relieved w shortly after they started, Mrs. Kincaid imitated son's example, who lay back in his corner with his hidden behind the *Lancet,* leaving her free to look of the window and think.

They travelled second class, and it was not until a stoppage occurred at some junction that their privacy was invaded. Then a large woman, oppressed by packages and baskets, entered, and, as the new-comer belonged to the category of persons who regard a railway journey as a heaven-sent opportunity to eat an extra meal, her feats with sandwiches had a fascination that rivalled the interest of the landscape.

Of course, three hours later, when the train reached Westport, Mary felt elated. Of course she gazed eagerly from the platform over the prospect. It was new and pleasant and refreshing. There was a little winding road with white palings, and a cottage with a red roof. A bell tolled softly across the meadows, and somebody standing near her said he supposed "that was for five o'clock service." To have exchanged the jostle of London for a place where people had time to remember service on a week-day, to be able to catch the chirp of the birds between the roll of the wheels, was immediately exhilarating. Then, too, as they drove to the house she scented the freshness of tar in the air that bespoke proximity to the sea. Her bosom lifted: "The blessed peace of it all!" she thought; "how happy I ought to be!"

But she was not happy. That first evening there came to her the soreness and sickness of recollection. Mrs. Kincaid and she were left alone, the doctor betaking himself to the hospital, and in the twilight they sat in the pretty little parlour, chatting fitfully. The soreness was engendered by the contrast of the present arrival to those she was used to. No unpacking of photographs here, she mused idly; no landlady loquacious

on the doings of last week's company; no stroll after tea with Tony just to see where the theatre was. How odd! She said "how odd!" but presently she meant "how painful!" And then it came upon her like a shock to reflect that the old life, to her long dead and buried, was going on still without her. The photographs were still being unpacked, and set forth on mantelpieces; landladies still waxed garrulous on last week's business; Tony was still strolling about the towns on Sunday evenings, just as he had done when she was with him. And he was going to be Miss Westland's husband, while *she* was here! How hideous, how frightful and unreal, it seemed!

She got up, and roamed over to the flower-stand between the curtains, on the pretext of examining the plants.

"Are you tired, Miss Brettan?" inquired Mrs. Kincaid; "perhaps you would like to go to your room early to-night?"

"No," she said, "thank you; I am afraid I feel a trifle strange as yet, that is all."

At the corner of the turning opposite was a hoarding, and a comic-opera poster shone out among the local shopkeepers' advertisements. The sudden sight of theatrical printing was like a welcome to her; she stood looking at it, thrilling at it, with the past alive and warm again in her heart.

"You will soon feel yourself at home," Mrs. Kincaid said after a pause; "I'm sure I can understand that you find it rather uncomfortable at first."

"Oh, not uncomfortable," Mary explained quickly "it is queer a little, just that. I mean, I do not know

what I ought to do, and I'm afraid of seeming inattentive through ignorance. What *is* a companion's work, Mrs. Kincaid?"

"Well, I've never had one," the old lady said with a laugh, "so I'm just as ignorant as you are. I think you and I will get on best, do you know, if we forget you have come as 'companion'—if you talk when you like, and keep quiet when you like. You see, it is literally a companion I want, not somebody to ring the bell for me, and order the dinner, and make herself useful; this isn't a big house, and I'm not a fashionable person: I want a woman who'll keep me from moping, and who'll be nice."

Her answer described her requirements fairly well, and Mary found that little indeed was expected of her in return for the salary, so little that she wondered sometimes if she earned it, small as it was. Excepting that she was continually conscious she must never be out of temper, and that she was frequently obliged to read aloud when she would sooner have sat in reverie, she was practically her own mistress. Even, as the days went by, she found herself giving utterance to a thought as it came to her, without pausing to conjecture its reception; speaking with the spontaneity which, with the paid companion, is always the last thing to be acquired.

Few pleasures are shorter-lived than the one of being restored to enough to eat, the reminiscence of hunger being no appetiser; and in a week her sense of novelty had almost entirely worn away. The routine grew familiar. They walked together; sometimes to the beach, but more *often in the* town, for the approach to the

sea tired Mrs. Kincaid. Westport, though on the coast, is not esteemed a watering-place by the people who regard as essential adjuncts to their sea a pier, parade, and plethora of brass bands; and in the summer Mary discovered the population of fifty thousand was not very greatly augmented. From Laburnum Lodge it took nearly twenty minutes to gain the shore, the way lying through several roads of private houses, the last of which was a hill and fatigued the elder woman especially. At the top of the incline the better-class houses came to an abrupt termination, and only a few cottages were somewhat forlornly scattered to right and left, before them an expanse of rather ragged grass, endowed with a bench or two, sloping to the shingles on which the waves broke. Despite its bareness, almost because of it, indeed, Mary thought the spot delightful; the quietude appealed to her, and there is an adaptability about the ocean which makes it congenial to every mood, so that one can joy or mourn more intensely by the sea than anywhere else. She often wished she could go alone and give herself up to undisturbed reflection in that murmurous calm.

They saw but little of the doctor. Now and again he came round for an hour or so, and at first Mary absented herself on these occasions, going up to her room, that his mother and he might be free for confidences. But Mrs. Kincaid commented on her retirement, saying it was unnecessary, and thenceforward she remained, joining in the conversation.

She did not chance to be out alone until she had been installed here nearly three months; and the afternoon when Mrs. Kincaid inquired if she would mind

selecting a novel for her at the circulating library, since they could not think of a list to despatch by a servant, the request was music to her. A desire to see the *Era*, and ascertain Carew's whereabouts, had been steadily growing within her, until of late the longing had risen almost to the intensity of a fever.

She crossed the interlying churchyard, and made her way along the High Street impatiently; and, reaching the railway bookstall, procured a copy of the latest issue. It was with difficulty she curbed an inclination to open it on the platform; but wishing to make the examination in solitude, she restrained herself until she had turned down the little lane at the station's side, and gained the gate where the coal-trucks came to an end and a patch of green began. She doubted whether the company would be touring so long, but the paper would tell her something of his doings under any circumstances. She rested it on the top bar and ran her eye eagerly down the titles under the heading of "On the Road." No, as she had supposed, the "Foibles" was not "out" now; the name did not occur. Had the tour broken up for good, she wondered, or was there merely a vacation? She would soon learn by Tony's "professional card." How well she knew the sheet! The sheet! she knew the column, its very number in the column—knew it followed "Farrell" and came before "De Vigne." She even recalled the week when he had abandoned the cheaper advertisements in alphabetical order. He had been cast for a part in a production. She remembered she had said, "Now you're going to create," and, laughing, he had answered, "Oh, I must have half a crown's worth 'to create!'" He

had been lying on the sofa—how it all came
her! What was he doing now? She found th
in an instant:

"MR. SEATON CAREW,
RESTING,
Assumes direction of Miss Olive Westland's Tour, Aug.
See 'Companies' page."

They were married! The phrasing of the t
attested it. He had married Miss Westland, and
master of her capital, and was, resting, in her a
"Oh," she muttered, "how he has walked over
that man! For the sake of two or three thousa
pounds, just for the sake of her money!" She soug
weakly for the company-advertisement referred to, b
the paragraphs swam together, and it was sever
minutes before she could discover it. Yes, here it wa
"'The Foibles of Fashion' and repertoire, openin
August 4th. 'Camille,' eh?" She laughed bitterl
"He was going to play Armand; it had always bee
his wish to play Armand: now he could do it! 'Und
the direction of Mr. Seaton Carew. Artists respectful
informed the company is complete. All communic
tions to be addressed: Mr. Seaton Carew, Bath Hot
Bournemouth.' Oh, my God!"

To think that while she had been starving in th
attic he had been calmly conducting his courtship,
reflect that in one of those terrible hours she ha
passed through he must have been dressing himself f
his wedding, punctured her heart. And now, while sh
leant on the gate, wrung with the knowledge, he w

whispering in the other woman's ear, calling her "Olive," and kissing her. She gripped the bar with both hands, her breast heaved tumultuously; it seemed to her her punishment was more than she had power to bear. Was not his sin viler than her own? she questioned; yet what price would he ever be called upon to pay for it? At most, perhaps, occasional discontent! The world would blame him not a whit; his offence was condoned already by a decent woman's hand. In the wife's eyes she, Mary, was of course an adventuress who had turned his weakness to account until the heroine appeared on the scene to reclaim him. How easy it was to be the heroine when one had a few thousand pounds to bid for a wedding-ring! How easy to be termed "adventuress" when men set so high a value on their names, and squandered their honour with such lavishness!

She let the paper lie where it had fallen, and bent her way to the library with lagging steps. In leaving it she encountered Dr. Kincaid on his road to the Lodge. He was rather glad of the meeting, the man to whom women had been only patients, but who of late had felt vaguely once or twice that it was agreeable to address some commonplace to Miss Brettan, and pleasant to hear her when she replied.

"Hallo," he said, in that voice of his which had so little inflection in it; "what have you been doing? Going home?"

"I've been to get a book for Mrs. Kincaid," she answered; "she was hoping you'd come round to-day."

"I meant to have come yesterday. Well, how are

you getting on? still satisfied with Westport? Not beginning to tire of it yet?"

"Indeed no," she said; "I like it very much, naturally. It's a great change from the life I had three months ago; I shouldn't be very grateful if I weren't satisfied."

"That's all right. Your coming was a good thing; my mother was saying the other evening it was a slice of luck."

"Oh, I am so glad!" she returned; "I have wanted to know whether I—did!"

"You 'do' uncommonly; I haven't seen her so content for a long while. You don't look very bright; d'ye feel well?"

"It's the heat," she averred; "yes, I am quite well, thank you; I have a slight headache this afternoon, nothing more."

She was wondering if Carew would ever cross her path again. How horrible it would be if chance brought him to play in the town, and she came face to face with him in the High Street, and betrayed what the meeting cost her!

"Hasn't my mother been out to-day herself? She ought to take advantage of the fine weather."

"I left her in the garden; I think she enjoys that better than taking walks."

And it might happen so easily, she reflected; why not that company among the two score companies and upward which in the course of every year stayed a week or a fortnight each in Westport! She would be frightened to leave the house.

"The garden, eh? I suppose when you first heard

there was a garden you expected to see apple-trees and strawberry-beds, didn't you—coming to the country—instead of a scrap of ground like that? I always say, when we want to fancy ourselves in London, all we need do is to go out there. There's a true Bloomsbury luxuriance about those plants."

"Oh, I don't think it's so bad; I think it's rather pretty, what there is of it. We had tea out there last night."

She might be walking with Mrs. Kincaid, and Tony and his wife suddenly confront her as they came round a corner. And "Miss Westland" would draw aside in contempt, of course, and Tony would droop his eyes, and—and if she turned white, and he detected her agitation, she should loathe herself! He would look at her, she might be sure; he would look at her before his eyes fell, never a doubt of it. Her womanhood was sensible of a certain tremulous elation to think there was no doubt of it—to think that, though they were less than nothing to each other now, they had once been too much for the man ever to contemplate her without her stirring some emotion in him.

"Then I missed an *al-fresco* repast? You must enliven the old lady a good deal if she goes in for that sort of thing; did you suggest it?"

"I don't know," she said; "we found ourselves agreeing it was stuffy indoors, and that tea outside would be pleasanter. I don't think I am a particularly enlivening person, but I'm better than no one, I dare say. It must have been rather dreary for her alone."

"You praise yourself very highly! why aren't you a particularly enlivening person?"

"I mean I've no fund of animal spirits. Some women always have a laugh ready; and we seldom laugh; we chat in the quietest fashion. Our days pass much in the style in which you see us when you come round—an armchair each, and some needlework or a novel. Mrs. Kincaid talks about you, and——"

"And you're secretly rather bored? That's a mother's privilege, you know, to weary everybody about her son; you mustn't be hard on her."

"I am interested, on the contrary; I think it's always interesting to hear of a man's work in a profession. By rights, of course, business-men ought to interest one just as much—nobody can do anything higher than his best, and to strive loyally in any pursuit is noble—but somehow the details of a profession rouse my sympathy more. And, then, Medicine was my father's."

"Were you the only child?"

"Yes. I wasn't much of a child, though; my mother died when I was quite young, and I was taught a lot through that. The practice wasn't very good—very remunerative, that is to say—and if a girl's father isn't well off she becomes a woman early. If I had had a brother now——"

"If you had had a brother—what?"

"I was thinking it might have made a good deal of difference in one way and another. Nothing in especial! I don't suppose he would have been of any pecuniary assistance; there would not have been anything to give him a start with. But I should have liked a brother—one older than I am."

"You would have made a very earnest man of him, I believe."

"Oh, my thoughts were rather of what he would have made of me. A brother must be such a counsellor to one: he goes into the world and learns; a girl can only stop at home and conjecture. Her actions are based on instinct; he has knowledge to guide him."

"Yet a woman's instinct generally keeps her the safer of the pair."

"It needs the education of life, doctor, surely?"

"No, I fancy not; just the alphabet at home. We medical men see misfortune in many shapes, and nine-tenths of the miserable women we encounter are not the ones who have been bred in ignorance of the world, but those who have had it for their only school. In my opinion the best tuition one woman can have is another good woman's."

"A mother's?"

"I think so. Half the women who marry are no more fitted to be mothers than the majority of men are to train sons. Many of the women who never marry were born to be mothers, and nobody woos them, or their wooers inspire no tenderness, and fine material is allowed to waste."

The entrance to a cottage they were passing stood open, and she could see into the parlour. There were teacups on the table, and a mug of wild flowers. On a garden-gate a child with a pink pinafore was slowly swinging. The brilliance of the day had subsided, and the town lay soft and yellow in the restfulness of sunset. A certain liquidity was assumed by the rugged street

in the haze that hung over it; a touch of transparence gilded its flights of steps, the tiles of the house-tops, and the homely faces of the fisher-folk where they loitered before their doors. There a girl sat netting among the hollyhocks, withholding confession from the youth who lounged beside her, yet lifting at times a smile to him which had not been wakened by the net. The melody of the hour intensified the burning in the woman's soul.

"Don't you consider——" said Kincaid.

He turned to her, strolling along with his hands behind him. He talked to her, and she answered him, until they reached the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

OWLY there stole into Kincaid's life a new in-
He began to be more eager to visit the Lodge,
metimes sensible of an odd reluctance to rise and
ven found the picture of the little drawing-room,
ts ease and lamplight, lingering with him after the
loor had closed. He was conscious in the atmo-
: of an added charm, a grace whose lack he had
ly noted, but which discovered the deficiency it
ed. A colour had been diffused over the bald-
f the home-comings, quickening their somewhat
itary colloquies, the accustomed questions, the re-
assurances, into the vitality of conversation. He
ccepted the baldness as a matter of course, re-
g that, strong as his attachment was for his
r—indubitable as was hers for him—the level
s of her solitude, and the dearth of gossip with
f, put a range of topics beyond reach. Latterly,
er, his tongue had moved more freely in the
ns; subjects occurred to him without the labour
earch, and the gaps in the discourse, which had
been but awkwardly bridged, were now avoided
her by a different route.
was, perhaps, to go beneath the surface of things,
le pathetic that the relations of mother and son
have been stimulated by the introduction of a

stranger; but if Mrs. Kincaid indeed connected Miss Brettan with the novel briskness of the parlance, it was only by attributing to her companionship an improvement in her own spirits which rendered her more conversationally disposed. The sources of reforms, moreover, are seldom investigated, people being addicted to receiving them in unanalytical content, and reserving their inquiries for retrogressions.

Nevertheless, if the understanding between the pair had been wholly complete, no stranger would have been capable of effecting the change which both remarked, and the man especially welcomed. The sameness of the subject-matter would have been diversified by the manner of its presentment. The fact was that, with all her affection for her son, the heart of Mrs. Kincaid remained outside her allusions to the profession which engrossed him. She was proud to have a doctor for a son, but vaguely: the career made no particular appeal to her, and an acquaintance with its details had seemed to her mind to really preclude the possibility of any great enthusiasm. Despite her goodness, she was, so far as he was concerned, wanting in that which can only be described as sympathy, though the word covers too much. It was just that subtlety of sympathy which affection *per se* is inadequate to create, and for whose birth love must co-operate with comprehension.

Personally Kincaid credited the full measure of the cheerier order of affairs to Miss Brettan's account, and regarded her engagement as a capital day's work. But between esteeming her responsible for the cheerfulness he found invigorating, and detecting it was she whose

society invigorated him, lay a distance he did not immediately accomplish.

Summer had deepened into autumn, and winter was at hand, before he had plainly admitted to himself he liked to go to see Miss Brettan, and felt a sentiment of friendship for her. He had not readily separated the person from the surroundings in which he saw her. The cosiness of the room, with two women smiling at him when he entered—always with a little surprise, for the time of his coming was uncertain—and getting tea for him, and being sorry when he had to leave them, had pleased his fancy, and it had been a process to remember her as an individual instead of as an element of the scene. It was by degrees he realized how many of his expressions of opinion were in reality directed to her, how many of the opinions would never have been expressed without her, and, grown cognizant of it, a flavour was imparted to his existence which had been wanting. His one friendship had been for Corri, and Corri was not here. It is scarcely too much to pronounce the months following, when his cordial liking for Miss Brettan was clear to him, and possessed of a fascination due very largely to its unexpectedness, the happiest Kincaid had known.

The development was less serene, but it was fortunately slow. Friendship does not trouble itself with questions; it debates neither its wisdom nor its return. It is only the warmer stage of interest that wants to know so much, and insists on the *quid pro quo* in feeling. When he advanced to the higher temperature Kincaid first tasted uneasiness.

It commenced oddly. He had gone to the house

earlier than was his habit, and the women were preparing for a walk. Mary stood by the mantel-piece. There was something they had meant to do; she said she would go alone to do it. He lay back in the depths of an armchair, and watched her while she spoke to his mother, watched the play of her features and the quick turn of her cheek. Then—it was the least significant of trivialities—she plucked a hairpin from her hair, and began to button her glove. It was revealed to him as he contemplated her that she was eminently lovable. His eyes dwelt on the tender curve of her figure, displayed by the flexion of her arm; he remarked the bend of the head, and the delicate modelling of her ear and neck. These things were quite new to him. He was stirred abruptly with the magic of her sex. The admiration did not last ten seconds, and before he saw her again he only recollected it once, quite suddenly. But the development had begun.

In his next visit he looked to see these beauties, and found them. This time, being voluntary, the admiration lasted longer. It was recurrent all the evening. He discovered a novel excellence in her performance of the simplest acts, and an additional enjoyment in talking with her. Perhaps it was, after all, wrong to declare his development a descent in satisfaction; in its initial period he was very happy. The child's bow is such a toy that the prick of his arrow only tickles us pleasantly, and the puncture is old before we suffer from the poison at the point. Yes, Kincaid was surprisingly happy in the birth of his love for Miss Brettan; it did him good.

Thoughts of her came to him while he sat at night-

time in his room. The bare little apartment witnessed all the phases of the man's love—its brightness, and then its misgivings. He had no confidant to prose to—he could never have spoken of this strange new thing which had happened to him under any circumstances. He used to sit and think of her alone, wondering if God would put it into her heart to care for him, wondering in all humility if it could be ordained that he should ever hold this dear woman in his arms and call her "wife."

He would not be in a position to give her luxury, and for a couple of years he certainly could not marry at all; but he believed primarily that he could at least give her content, and in reflecting what she would make of life for him he smiled. The salary he drew from his post was not a very large one, but his mother's means sufficed for her requirements, and he was able to lay almost the whole of it aside. He thought, when a couple of years had gone by, he would be justified in furnishing a small house, and that he might reasonably expect, through the introductions his appointment had procured him, to establish a practice. It would be rather pinched for them at first, of course, but she would not mind that much if she were fond of him. "Fond" of him! She "fond" of him! Could it be possible? he asked himself—Miss Brettan fond of him! She was so composed, so quiet, she seemed such a long way off now that he wanted her for his own. Would it really ever happen that the woman whose hand had merely touched him in courtesy would one day be uttering words of love for him, and saying "my husband"?

He wrestled long with his tenderness; the misgivings

came quickly. After all, she was comfortable a was—she was provided for, she had no pecuniary here. Had he the right to beg her to relinquis comparative ease, and struggle by his side oppr by the worries of a precarious income? Then, he himself, they might take in patients: that would augn the income. And she was a dependant now; if married him she would be her own mistress. weighed all the pros and cons; he was no boy to c the recklessness of self-indulgence the splendour of d votion. He balanced the arguments on either side lo and carefully. If he asked her to come to him, should be with the conviction he was doing her n wrong. He saw how easy it would be to deceiv himself, and to feel persuaded that the fact of her being in a situation made matrimony an advance to her, whether she wedded well or ill. He debated the advisability of owning his love as judicially as though he were sure of receiving hers if he did. He would act on no impulse, and perhaps spoil her life through impatience to learn how he stood with her before he had determined whether the confession would be fair. But he was very impatient. Through months he used to come away after every visit to the Lodge striving to discern importance in some answer or another she had made him, some question she had put to him, some gesture that could have meant a great deal or just nothing at all. It appeared to him that he had loved her much longer than he had; and he had made no progress. There were moments when he upbraided himself for being clumsy and stupid; some men in his place, he thought, would have divined what her feelings

were long ago. And if, indeed, she had an affection for him, that would settle the problem he could not succeed in solving unaided. If she felt for him a tithe of what he felt for her, it would be gentler to ask her to share his responsibilities than to let her remain unwooed. But did she? could she? Over and over the beaten ground he went: Could she? did she?

He never queried the wisdom of marrying her on his own account: the privilege of cherishing her in health and nursing her in sickness, of having her head pillowed on his breast, and confiding his hopes to her sympathy; of going through life with her in a union in which she would give to him all her inward self—the sacred and withheld identity which no one but a husband can ever explore in a woman—looked to him a joy for which he could never be less than intensely and unspeakably grateful as long as the life endured. He ceased to marvel at the birth of his love, it looked natural now; she seemed to belong to Westport so wholly by this time. He no longer contrasted the present atmosphere of the villa with the duller atmosphere she had banished. He had forgotten that duller atmosphere. She was there—it was as if she had always been there. To reflect that there had been a period when he had known no Mary Brettan was strange. He wondered he had not felt the want of her. The day he met her in Corri's office appeared to him dim in the mists of at least five years. The exterior of the man, and the yearnings within him—Kincaid as he knew himself, and the doctor as he was known to the hospital—were so at variance that the incongruity would have been ludicrous if it had not been beautiful.

When Mary saw he had begun to care for her, it was the greatest tremor of insecurity she had experienced since the date of her arrival. She had foretasted many disasters in the interval, been harassed by many fears, but that Dr. Kincaid might fall in love with her was a contingency that had never entered her head. It was so utterly unexpected that for a week she had discredited the evidence of her senses, and when the truth was too palpable to be blinked any longer, her remaining hope was that he might decide never to speak. Here the meditations of the man and the woman were concerned with the same theme—both revolved the claims of silence, but from different standpoints. His consideration was whether avowal was unjust to her; she sustained herself by attributing to him a reluctance to commit himself to a woman of whom he knew so little. She clung to this haven she had found; her refusal, if indeed he did propose to her, would surely necessitate her relinquishing it. Mrs. Kincaid might not desire to see her "companion" marry her son, but still less would she desire to retain a companion who had rejected him. It had been as peaceful here as any place could be for her now, felt Mary; the thought of being driven forth to do battle with the world again terrified her. She wondered if Mrs. Kincaid had "noticed anything"; it was hard to believe she could have avoided it, but she had evinced no sign of suspicion: her manner was the same as usual.

With the complication which had arisen to disturb her, the woman perceived how prematurely old she was. Her courage had all gone, she told herself; she said she had passed the capability for any sustained effort;

and it was a fact that the uneventful tenor of the life she had been leading, congenial because it demanded no energy, had done much to render her lassitude permanent. Her pain, the rawness of it, had dulled—she could touch the wound now without writhing; but it had left her wearied unto death. To attempt to forget had been beyond her; recollection continued to be her secret luxury, and the inertia permitted by her position lent itself so thoroughly to a dual existence that to her own mind she had often seemed to be living more acutely in her reminiscences than in her intercourse with the lady whom she served.

From the commencement of the tour, which had started in the autumn of the preceding year, she had kept herself posted in Carew's movements as regularly as was practicable. It was frequently very difficult for her to gain access to a theatrical paper; but generally she contrived to see one somehow, if not on the day it reached the town, then later, and read the meagre chronicle of his doings with avidity. She knew what parts he played, and what cities he was visiting. It was a morbid fascination, but to see his name mentioned nearly every week, and to be able to know where he was, appeared to her a ray of sunshine for which she owed her one debt of thankfulness to his profession. If he had been anything but an actor, if the man could have gone abroad or died, without it being possible for her to be aware of it, she thought her situation would have been too hideous for words. To steal that weekly glimpse of the paper was her weekly glimmer of sensation; sometimes the past seemed actually to leap into life again as the familiar capitals met her gaze, and

she was momentarily in the old surroundings once more.

There had only been two tours, and after the second she had watched his "card" anxiously to ascertain the proposed arrangements for the next. Three months had slipped away while she watched it, and between his and his agent's name nothing had been added but the "Resting."

At last, one day after she had been reading from the London newspaper to Mrs. Kincaid, and was sitting silent with it lying on her lap, she had derived some further information. A word of the theatrical gossip had caught her eye, and, unperceived by the old lady, she started violently. She had seen "Seaton Carew." For a minute she could not quell her agitation sufficiently to pick the paper up and peruse the paragraph; she sat staring down at it and deciphering nothing. When she raised it at length, she learnt that Miss Olive Westland and her husband, Mr. Seaton Carew, encouraged by their successes in the provinces, had decided to make a bid for the favour of Metropolitan audiences, and had completed negotiations by which the Boudoir Theatre would be opened under their management at the end of the ensuing month. It was added that this of late unfortunate house was to be redecorated, and a reference to an artist or two already engaged showed Mary that Carew was playing with big stakes.

Thenceforward she had had a new medium of intelligence, and one attainable without trouble, for the London paper was delivered at the Lodge daily. As the date for the production drew near, her impatience to hear the verdict on its merits had grown so strong

that the superficial calm of her demeanour often threatened to break down. The walls of the country parlour cooped her; she saw through them into the city beyond, saw on to a draughty stage dimly lighted at a rehearsal which Carew was conducting.

The piece had failed; on the morning when she learned it had failed she had dumbly participated in the chagrin of the failure. "Yes" and "No" she had answered, and seen with the eyes of her heart the gloom of a man's face she had once been used to press against her own. She did not care, she vowed; her sole feeling with regard to the undertaking had been curiosity—if it had been more than curiosity she would despise herself; but her countenance was shadowed notwithstanding; and very perfunctory indeed was the tone of her replies.

She continued to scan the Boudoir advertisement every day, and it was not long before she had ascertained that another venture was in preparation. And she held more skeins of wool, and watched with veiled eagerness this advertisement develop like its predecessor. Recently the play had been produced, and the "notice" had been read by her in Mrs. Kincaid's presence. When she finished it she knew that Carew's hopes were over—that unless the capital of which his marriage had possessed him was far larger than had been believed, the season at the Boudoir would see it exhausted. There were no high encomiums passed upon his performance, either; he was dismissed in an indifferent sentence like his wife. Praise for his acting, which might have procured him Metropolitan engagements, had not been accorded, and as artist as well as manager his attempt had fallen to the ground.

When Kincaid, who little dreamed of the past whi was flooding the woman's brain, went round to the hou one evening, the servant told him his mother had a ready gone to her room, and that Miss Brettan was s ting with her. She was not feeling well, the girl add in explanation.

"Say I'm here, please," he requested, "and ask if may come up."

As he spoke Miss Brettan came down the stairs.

"Ah, doctor," she said; "Mrs. Kincaid has gone bed."

"So I hear. What's the matter with her?"

"Only neuralgia; she has had it all day. She h just fallen asleep."

"Then I had better not go up to see her?"

"I don't think I would, if I were you; it would b a pity to disturb her. I have just come down to get a book

"You are going to sit in her room?"

"Yes; in case she wakens of her own accord."

They stood speaking in the hall, outside the parlo door.

"Where is your book?" he said.

"Inside. I am sorry you should have come rou for nothing; Mrs. Kincaid will be so disappointed wh she hears about it. May I tell her you will come aga to-morrow?"

"Yes, I'll look round some time during the day, it's only for a moment. I think I'll sit down awh before I go."

"Will you?" she said. "I beg your pardon."

She opened the door, and he followed her into t room.

"You won't mind my leaving you?" she inquired, "I don't want to remain away from your mother, lest she *should* want anything."

It was nearly dark in the parlour; the lamp had not been lighted, and the fire was low. A little snow whitened the laburnum-tree which was visible through the window. It was an evening in January, and Mary had been in Westport now nearly two years.

"Can you see to find the book?" he said. "Where did you leave it?"

"It was on the sideboard; Ellen must have moved it, I expect. I'll ask her where she's put it."

"No, don't do that; I'll light the lamp for you."

She lifted the globe while he struck a match. It was his last, and it went out.

"Never mind," he said; "we'll get a light from the fire."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "but I'm giving you so much trouble; you had better let me call the girl!"

A dread of what might happen in this darkness was coming over her. "You had much better let me call the girl," she repeated.

"Try if you can get a light with this first," he said; "see, I'll shift that lump of ash; press it in where the coals are red."

She stooped over the grate, one hand holding the twist of paper, the other resting on the mantel-piece. He leant beside her, shifting the embers with his foot.

It flashed back at her, as the foot went to and fro, how Tony had stood at a mantelpiece kicking the faded embers that night in Leicester, while he was breaking his news. A sickening anxiety swept through her to

get away from Kincaid before he could have a chance to touch her. The paper charred and curled in the heat without catching a flame, and in her impatience she hated him for the delay. She detested herself for being here, lingering in the gloaming with a man who had dared to feel about her in the same way that once upon a time Tony had felt.

She rose abruptly.

"It's no use, doctor; Ellen will have to do the work, after all."

"Don't go just yet," he said; "I want to speak to you, Miss Brettan."

"I cannot stay any longer," she declared. "I——"

"You will give me a minute? There is something I have been waiting to say to you; I have been waiting a long while."

She raised her face to him. In the shadows which filled the room he could see little more of it than her eyes.

"Don't say it," she replied. "I think that I can guess, perhaps . . . Don't say it, Dr. Kincaid!"

"Yes!" he insisted, "I must do that—I must say it, and you shall give me your answer then; I am bound to tell you before I take your answer, Mary. My dear, I love you!"

"Oh, you wanton!" she shivered; "you degraded, horrible thing!"

"If you can't care for me, you have only to tell me so to-night; it shall never be a worry to you. I would not have my love become a worry to you, to make you wish I were not here. But if you can care, in time, a little . . . if you think that when I am

able to ask you to come to me you could come . . . oh, my dear one, all my life I will be tender to you—all my life!"

He could not see her eyes any longer; her head was bent upon her bosom, and in her silence the big man trembled.

The servant came in with the taper, kindling the lamp and letting down the blinds. They stood on the hearth watching her dumbly while she moved about. And when the blinds were lowered she screwed the wicks higher, so that the room was bright; and then Kincaid turned his gaze towards the woman's face, and yearned over its paleness.

"Is there anything else, miss?"

"No, Ellen, thank you; I think that's all."

"Mary!" he said.

"I am so sorry. You cannot think how sorry I am to have brought you pain."

"You could never care—not ever so little—for me?"

"Not in that way: no."

He looked away from her—looked at the engraving of Wellington and Blucher meeting on the field of Waterloo; stared at the filter on the sideboard, through which the water fell drop by drop. A heavy weight seemed to have come suddenly down upon him, so that he breathed under it laboriously. He wanted to speak in order to curtail the pause, which he understood must be trying to her; but he could not think of anything to say, nor could he shake his brain clear of her last words, which appeared to him incessantly reiterated. He felt as if his hope of her had been something vital, and she had stamped it out, to leave

him confronting a new beginning, so strange that tim must elapse before it would be possible for him t realize how wholly strange it was going to be. Eve while he strove to address her it was difficult to fe that she was still very close to him. Her tones lingered the dress she wore emphasized itself upon his conscious ness more and more; but from her presence he had curious sensation of being remote. Like the perspectiv of a landscape, she seemed no less distant because h knew that she was near.

"Good-night," he said at length abruptly. "Yo mustn't let this thing trouble you, you know. I sha always be glad I am fond of you; I shall always b glad I told you so: I was hoping until I spoke, an now I understand. It's so much better to understan than to go on hoping for what never can come."

She searched pityingly for something kind; but th futility of phrases daunted her.

"I had better close the door after you," she mu mured, "or it will make a noise."

They went out into the passage, and stood togethe on the step.

"It's beginning to snow again," he remarked; "i looks as if we were going to have a heavy fall."

"Yes," she said dully, glancing at the sky.

She put out her hand, and it lay for an instan in his.

"Once more, Miss Brettan, good-night."

"Good-night to you, Dr. Kincaid."

As he reached the path he turned, in bowing t

her; she was silhouetted against the gaslight of the hall. Then her figure was withdrawn, and the view of the interior was narrowed, until, while he looked back, the brightness vanished altogether and the door was shut.

CHAPTER IX.

AND so it was all over.

"All over," he said to himself—"over and don with, Philip! Steady yourself, Philip; put a front on i and take it fighting!"

But they were only words—as yet he could nc "take it fighting"—they meant nothing. It was to soon; his hope had been slaughtered too newly. Nc was the knowledge that he was never going to hol her—the feeling that the air-castles habitation ha made homely had melted into mist—quite all the gri which lay upon him as he made his way along the il lit streets. There was, besides, a very cruel smart- the abstract pain of being such a little to one who w so much to him.

He paid his visit to the wards that night with hidden where it burned. Those of the patients wl were still awake had the doctor at their bed-sides; a he dressed such wounds as needed to be dressed, a heard the little peevish questions and the dull co plaints just as he had done the night before. T nurse walked softly past the sleepers with her shad lamp, the travelling light along the length of darkne and once or twice he spoke a word to her—this al like the night before. And when, the doctor's dut done, the man had gained the room where the memor

of Mary always dwelt with him, he thought of that night before, and sat with elbows on the table while the hours struck, remembering what had happened since.

The necessity for returning to the house so speedily, to see his mother, was eminently distasteful; he longed to escape it. And then he suddenly warmed towards her in self-reproach, thinking it had been very hard of him to wish to neglect his mother in order to spare awkwardness to another woman. His repugnance to the task was deep-rooted, all the same, nor did it lessen as the afternoon approached. But for the fact of yesterday's indisposition, he could never have brought himself to overcome it.

The embarrassment he had feared, however, was avoided by Miss Brettan's absence. When he entered she was out of the room, and, struggling with a growing anxiety to ask after her, he sat awhile in the parlour, alternately hoping and dreading she would come in. Mrs. Kincaid was quite well again to-day, she declared; Mary had told her of his call the previous evening; how long was it he had stopped?

"Oh, not very long," he said; "has the neuralgia quite gone?"

"I feel a little weary after it, that's all. Is there anything fresh, Philip?"

"Fresh?" he answered vaguely; "no, dear, I don't know that there's anything very fresh."

"You look tired yourself," she said; "I thought that perhaps you were troubled."

She thought, too, Miss Brettan had looked troubled, and instinct pointed to something having occurred

during the call which was not mentioned. A conviction that her son was getting fond of her companion had been unspoken in her mind for some time, and under her placid questions now rankled a little wistfulness in feeling that she was not held dear enough for confidence. She wanted to say to him outright: "Philip, did you tell that woman you were fond of her when I was upstairs last night?" but was frightened to seem inquisitive, since he appeared to design her to remain outside the matter. He, with never an inkling she could suspect his love, meanwhile reflected how essential for Mary's continued peace it was that she should never conjecture he had been refused.

It is doubtful whether he had ever felt so wholly tender towards his mother as he did in these moments while he admitted that it was imperative for Mary's sake to keep the secret from her; and doubtful whether the mother's heart had ever turned so far aside from him as while she perceived that she was never to be told.

They exchanged commonplaces with the one grave subject throbbing in the mind of each. Of the two, perhaps the mother was the more laboured, so that presently he noticed what uphill work it was, and checked a sigh, to lapse into reverie from which he roused himself with an effort by fits and starts. She heard the sigh, and could have echoed it, meditating sadly that the presence of her companion was required now to make her society endurable to him. But she would not refer to Mary; she bent over her wool-work, and the needle went in and out with feeble regularity while she maintained a wounded silence

which the man was regarding as an unwillingness to talk.

He said, at length, he must be going, and she did not offer to detain him.

"I want to hurry back this afternoon; you won't mind?"

"No," she murmured; "you know what you have to do, Philip, better than I."

He stooped and kissed her. For the first time in her life she did not return his kiss. She gave him her cheek, and rested one hand a little tremulously on his shoulder.

"Good-bye," she said; her tone was so gentle he did not remark the absence of the caress. "Don't go working too hard, Phil!"

He patted the hand reassuringly, and let himself out. Then the hand crept slowly up to her eyes, and she wiped some tears away. The wool-work drooped to her lap, and she sat recalling a little boy who had been used to talk of the wondrous things he was going to do for "mother" when he became a man, and who now had become a man, living for a strange woman, and full of a love which "mother" might only guess.

She could not feel quite so cordial to Mary as she had done. To think of her holding her son's confidence, while she was left to speculate, made the need for surmises seem harder. And Philip was unhappy: her companion must be indifferent to him; nothing but that could account for the unhappiness or for the reservation. She could have forgiven her engrossing his affections—with time—but her indifference was more than she could bring herself to condone. Still, this was the

woman he loved, and in their daily intercourse she endeavoured to hide from her the chagrin she felt, as she had hidden her suspicions. Perhaps it was, though, that resentment was less easy to mask than suspicion, or perhaps, during her retreat while his visit was being paid, Mary's nervousness had inclined her to overestimate the probabilities of disclosure, and so rendered her now very scrutinous for signs of cognizance, for in the ensuing week the communion between the pair had its hitches, despite Mrs. Kincaid's determination. Their parlance was scarcely so unrestricted as usual; there were long pauses which seemed to Miss Brettan, dwelling on its likelihood, emphatically significant of condemnation—often, indeed, to be preparatory to an onslaught of inquiry. She was exceedingly uncomfortable during this week, and was sometimes only deterred from yielding to an impulse to proclaim the fact of her rejection, and appeal to the other's fairness to exonerate her, by the recollection that it was, after all, just possible the avowal might have the effect of transforming a bush into an officer.

She could not venture to repeat the retirement to her room on the next occasion of the doctor's coming. Nearly a fortnight had gone by before he came; and she forced herself to turn to him with a few remarks, made the more difficult by her apprehension of the mother's divination of their difficulty and the evident effort of respondency in him. He was not the man to be able to cover his feelings by a flow of small-talk, his life had not qualified him for it; he could simply conceal emotion, he could not feign jocundity, and it was an ordeal to him sitting there in the presence of Mary

and witnessing attempts in which he painfully perceived himself so wholly unadapted to co-operate. The knowledge that the simulated ease should have originated with himself rather than with her caused his want of concurrence to seem additionally ungracious, and he feared she must think him boorish, and disposed to parade his disappointment for the purpose of exciting her compassion.

Strongly, therefore, as he had desired to avoid a break in the social routine, his subsequent visits were made at longer intervals, and more often than not curtailed on the plea of work. It was, as yet at all events, clearly impossible for him to behave to her as if nothing untoward had happened, and, wishful to convey the impression of restored tranquillity, to shun the house awhile looked to him at least a wiser course than to haunt it with discomposure patent. Thus the restraint which Mrs. Kincaid was imposing upon herself had to bear a further burden; Miss Brettan was driving her son from her side. The pauses became more frequent, and, to Mary, more than ever ominous. Indeed, while the mother mused mournfully on the consequences of her engagement, the companion herself was questioning how long she could expect to retain it. She began to consider whether she ought not to relinquish it of her own accord, to elude the indignity of a dismissal. Even if Mrs. Kincaid did fail to suspect the reason of her son absenting himself in this fashion, her responsibility was just the same, she reflected. It was she who divided the pair, and who was accountable for the hurt expression her employer's countenance now so constantly assumed. She felt wearily that women had

a great deal to endure in life, what with the men they cared for, and the men for whom they did not care. There seemed no privileges pertaining to their sex; being feminine only amplified the scope for vexation. A fact she did not see was that one of the most pathetic things in connection with the unloved lover is the irritability with which the woman so often thinks about him.

With what sentiments she might have listened to Kincaid's suit had she met him prior to her intimacy with Carew there is no means of conjecturing. Now he touched her not at all; but the intimacy had been an experience which engulfed so much of her sensibility, that to speculate upon her attitude as it might have been had her passion and her fall never occurred is akin to speculating on the potentialities of a different being. Kincaid's rival, in truth, was the most powerful one a lover can ever oppose: the rival of a vivid remembrance—always a doughty antagonist, and never so impregnable as when the woman is instinctively a good woman and has waived her goodness for the sake of the man she is remembering.

The idea entered Mary's head of endeavouring to secure an opportunity of speaking alone with the doctor, and letting him know he was paining his mother by so rarely coming now; but such an opportunity was not easy to gain, for when he did come his mother of course was present. She thought of writing, but by word of mouth a suggestion would suffice, whilst a letter, considering her acquaintance with the cause, would have its awkwardness.

More than two months had gone by since the night

his proposal when Mrs. Kincaid made her plaint. It as on a Sunday morning. Mary was standing before ıe window looking out into the brightness of sun- ıine, while the elder woman sat moodily in her ac- ıstomed seat.

"Are we going to church?" asked Mary presently.

"Yes, I suppose so; there's plenty of time, is there ot?"

"Oh, it's early yet!—not ten. What a lovely day, ın't it? The spring has begun in earnest."

"Yes," assented the other absently.

There was a short silence after the monosyllable, ınd then:

"I shall not run any risk of missing Dr. Kincaid by ;oing out; he isn't such a frequent visitor that I need ıe afraid of that!"

Her addendum had in it so much more of pathos han of testiness, that after the instant of dismay her ompanion felt acutely sorry for her.

"A doctor's time is scarcely his own, is it?" she ıurmured, turning; "there are so many calls upon it."

Mrs. Kincaid did not reply immediately, and to ſary the delay seemed to accentuate the feebleness of er rejoinder.

"I mean," she said, stumbling on in an effort to ıvigorate it, "that it is not as if he were able to leave ıe hospital whenever he has the inclination. There ıay be cases——"

"He used to be able to come often; why should he ɔt be able now?"

"Yes——" faltered Miss Brettan.

"I have not asked him; I can be sure it is a good

reason that keeps him from me, of course; but it is hard, when you are living in the same town as your son, not to have him with you for longer than an hour in a month. I don't see much more of him than that, lately, you are aware. Yesterday-week he was here last; he stayed twenty minutes. The time before, he said he was in a hurry before he said, 'How do you do?' He never put his hat down—you may have noticed it?"

"Yes, I noticed it," Miss Brettan admitted.

"You know; oh, you do know!" she cried inwardly, with a sinking of the heart. "Now, what am I to do?"

"Don't imagine I am blaming him," pursued Mrs. Kincaid, "I am not blaming anybody; the reason may be very powerful indeed. Only it seems rather unfair that I should have to suffer for it, considering that I am even ignorant what it is."

"Then why not speak to Dr. Kincaid? If he understood you felt his absence so keenly, you may be sure he would try to come oftener. Why don't you tell him that you miss him?"

"I shall never sue to my son for his visits," said the old lady with a touch of dignity, "nor do I desire to find out why he stops away. That is quite his own affair. At my age we begin to see that our children have rights we mustn't intrude into—secrets which must be told to us freely by them, or not told at all. We begin to see it, only we are old to learn. There, my dear, don't let us talk about the subject, it's not an agreeable one; I think we had better go and dress."

Mary looked at her a little helplessly; there was a finality in her tone which precluded the possibility of

any advance, and threatened to leave them one each side of a wall which, if partially demolished by the reference, had also been approached by it.

It was more than ever manifest to Miss Brettan that the task of remonstrating with the doctor devolved upon herself, and she decided she would write him a note that afternoon. Shortly after dinner Mrs. Kincaid, tempted by the fineness of the day, went out into the garden, and, left to her own devices in the parlour, Mary drew her chair to the escritoire with this intention. She would write a few lines, she thought, however clumsy, and despatch them at once. Still, they were not easy lines to produce, and, the resolution to be slap-dash notwithstanding, she nibbled her pen a good deal in the course of their composition; the self-consciousness which invaded some of the sentences was too glaring. Finished at last, she slipped the note into her pocket, and, joining the widow, announced a wish to go for a walk.

"Oh, by all means; why not?"

"I thought perhaps you might be wanting me," she returned, not without chafing under the tie of servitude.

"No," said Mrs. Kincaid; "I shall get along very well; I'm gardening."

She was, indeed, more cheerful than Mary had seen her for some while, busying herself among the violets, and stooping over the crocuses to clear the soil away.

"Go along," she added, nodding across her shoulder; "a walk will do you good."

Though the wish for one had only been expressed to avoid the mediation of a servant, the pretext having

been put forward, Mary thought she might advantageously avail herself of it, and, the missive posted, she extended her excursion as far as the beach.

Sauntering along, however, it struck her that, despite Mrs. Kincaid's assertion, the chances were rather in favour of the doctor making his overdue call that afternoon, and she regretted the probability had not occured to her earlier. His mother being in the garden, she might have been able to convey her intimation to him verbally, and so have dispensed with the laboured letter. Chagrined at the oversight, she bent her way homeward, and, in view of the Lodge, perceived him in the act of quitting it. They came face to face not fifty yards from the door. In remembrance her letter now appeared more stupid than ever, and she would have given much to have postponed transmitting it.

"I heard you were walking," he remarked as they stood fronting each other on the pavement; "have you been far?"

"Not very," she said; "I changed my mind. How did you find your mother, doctor?"

"She had been pottering about on the wet ground, which was none too wise of her. Why do you ask?"

"I—she has been missing you a little, I think; she wants you there more often."

"Oh," he said, "I am very sorry! Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure; it is more than a little she misses you. In point of fact, I have just written to you, Dr. Kincaid."

"To me? What—about this?"

"Yes."

"I did not know," he said; "I never supposed she would miss me like that. It was very kind of you."

"I wished to speak to you about it before. I have seen for some time she was distressed."

"Has she said anything?"

"She only mentioned it this morning, but I have noticed."

"It was very kind of you," he repeated; "I am much obliged."

Both suffered slightly from the consciousness of suppression; and after a few seconds she said boldly:

"Dr. Kincaid, if you are staying away with any idea of sparing embarrassment to me, I beg that you will put me outside the matter altogether."

"Of course," he rejoined, "I did suppose you found my coming unwelcome; I was afraid it must be."

"But do you suppose I could consent to keep you from your mother's house? You must see—the responsibility of it! What I should like to know is: are you staying away solely for my sake?"

"I did not wish to intrude my trouble on you."

"No," she said; "that is not what I mean. I am glad I have met you; I want to speak to you plainly. I have thought perhaps it hurt you to come; that my being there reminded—that you didn't like it. If that is so——"

"I think you are exaggerating the importance of the thing!" he declared. "It is very nice and womanly of you, but you are making yourself unhappy without any reason. I have had a good deal to occupy me of late—for the future I shall go more often."

"I feel very guilty," she answered. "If I am right

in imagining it would be pleasanter for you to absent yourself than to go there and see me, my course is clear. It is not my home, you know; I am in a situation, and it can be given up."

"You mustn't talk like that!" he answered. "I must have blundered very badly to give you such an idea. Don't let us stand here. Do you mind turning back a little way? If my confession to you obliged you to leave Westport, I should reproach myself for it bitterly."

They strolled slowly down the street, and during a minute each of the pair sought phrases.

"It is certain," she said abruptly, "that my being your mother's 'companion' is quite wrong. If I were not in the house you would go there the same as formerly. I can't help feeling that."

"But I will go there the same as formerly," he averred; "I have said so!"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Doesn't that satisfy you?"

"You will go, but the fact remains that you would rather not; and the cause of your reluctance is my presence there."

"It is you who are insisting on the reluctance," he replied evasively; "*I* have not said I am reluctant. I thought you would prefer me to avoid you for a while; personally——"

"Oh!" she said, "do you think I have not seen? I know very well the position is a false one!"

"I told you I would never become a worry to you," he said humbly; "I have been trying to keep my word."

"You have been everything that is considerate; the

fault is my own. I ought to have resigned my place with your mother the day after you spoke to me."

"I don't think that would have helped me much," he responded. "You must understand that a change in your life like that was the very last thing I desired my love to effect."

At the word "love" the woman flinched a little, and he himself had not been void of sensation in uttering it. The sound of it was loud to both of them, but to her it added to the sense of awkwardness, while to the man it seemed to bring them nearer.

"It was very dense of me," he went on; "but with all the consequences of speaking to you that I foresaw, I never took into account the one that has happened. I wondered if I was justified in asking you to give up a comfortable livelihood for the cares of such a home as I could offer; I considered half a dozen things; but that I might be making the house unbearable to you I overlooked. Now, with your interest at heart all the time, I have injured you. I can't tell you how sorry I am to learn it!"

"It is not unbearable," she said; "'unbearable' is much too strong. But I do see my duty, and I know the right thing is for me to go away; your mother would have you then as she ought to have you. While I stop, it can never be really free for either of you. And of course she knows."

"Do you think she does?" he exclaimed.

"Are women blind? Of course she knows! And what can she feel towards me? It is only the affection she has for you that prevents her discharging me."

"Oh, don't!" he said. "'Discharging' you!"

"What am I? I am only her servant. Don't blink facts, Dr. Kincaid; I am your mother's 'companion,' a woman you had never seen two years ago. It would have been a good deal better for you if you had never seen me at all!"

"You can't say what would have been best for *me*," he replied unsteadily; "I would rather have known you as I do than that we hadn't met. For yourself, perhaps——"

"Hush!" she interrupted; "we can neither of us forget what our meeting was! For myself, I owe my very life to meeting you; that is why the result of it is so abominable—such a shame! I haven't said much, but I remember every day what I owe you. I know I owe you the very clothes I wear!"

"For Heaven's sake!" he muttered.

"And my repayment is to make you unhappy—and her unhappy. It is noble!"

Her pace quickened, and to see her excited acted upon him very strongly. He longed to comfort her, and because this was impossible by reason of the disparity of their sentiments, the sight of her emotion was more painful. He had never felt the hopelessness of his attachment so heavy on him as now that he saw her disturbed on account of it, and realized at the same time that it debarred him from offering her consolation. They walked along, gazing before them fixedly into the vista of the shut-up shops and Sunday quietude, until at last he said with an effort:

"If you did go you would make me unhappier than ever."

She did not reply to this, and after a glance at the troubled profile:

"I am ready to do whatever you want," he added; "whatever will make the position easiest to you. It seems that, with the best intentions towards each of you, I have only succeeded in giving annoyance to you both. But the wrong to my mother can be remedied, and if you let me drive you away from the house I shall have done some lasting harm. Why don't you say that you will remain?"

"Because I am not sure about it. I can't determine."

"Your objection was the fancy that you were responsible for my so seldom seeing her; I have promised I will see her as often as I can."

She bit her lips, without speaking.

"I can't do any more—can I?"

"No," she confessed.

"Then, what is the matter?"

"The matter is that——"

"Yes," he said; "what is it?"

"You show me more plainly every minute that I ought to go."

Something in the dumbness with which this announcement was received told her how unexpected it had been. And, indeed, to hear that his love, unperceived by himself, had been fighting against him was the hardest thing he had had to bear. Sensible that every remonstrance he suffered to escape his lips could only estrange them further, the helplessness of his condition wrung the man. They were now crossing the churchyard, and she said something about the impracticability of her going any farther.

"Since our talk will have the effect of taking you to the Lodge more frequently, Dr. Kincaid, it hasn't been useless."

"Wait a second!" he said. He paused by the porch, and looked at her. "I—I can't leave you like this. Mary—!"

"Oh!" she faltered, "don't say anything—don't!"

"I must; what is the good?—I keep back everything, and you still know! You will always know! Nothing could have been more honestly meant than my assurance that I would never bring distress to you, and I have brought distress. Let us look the thing squarely in the eyes: you won't be my wife, but you needn't go away. What would you do? Whom do you know? Leaving my loss of you out of the question, think of the self-reproach!"

Inside the church an outburst of children's voices, muffled somewhat by the shut door, but still too near to be wholly beautiful, rose suddenly in hymn. She stood with averted face, staring over the rankness of the grass the wind was stirring lightly among the gravestones.

"Let us look at the thing squarely for once," he said again. "We are both remembering I love you; nothing can really be gained by ignoring the fact. If the circumstances were different, if you had somewhere to go, I should have less right to interfere; but friendless as you are, your leaving would mean a constant shame to me. All the time I should be thinking: 'She was at peace in a home, and you drove her out from it!' To see the woman he loves wander away to be adrift among strangers; knowing she goes unprotected;

to want, perhaps, for the barest necessities—good heavens! do you suppose there is any man who could bear the sight? I should feel as if I had turned you out of doors."

A sudden tremor seized her, so that she shivered as if with chill.

"Sit down," he said authoritatively. "We must come to an understanding."

But his protest was not continued immediately, and in the shelter of the porch both were thoughtful. She was the first to speak again, after all.

"You are persuading me to be a great coward," she said unsteadily, "and I am not a very brave woman at the best. If I do what is right for us both, I may give you pain in the present, but I shall spare you the unhappiness you will have if you go on meeting me every day."

"You consider my welfare and her welfare, but not your own. And why—you would spare me nothing!"

"You will never be satisfied. Oh, yes, let us be honest to each other. You are right: your misgivings about me are true enough; but you are principally anxious for me to stop that you may still see me. And what will come of it? I can never marry you, never; and you will be wretched. If I gave you a chance to forget——"

"I shall never forget, whether you stop or whether you go."

"You *must* forget!" she cried. "You must forget me till it is as if you had never known me. I will not be burdened with the knowledge that I am spoiling your life. I will not!"

"Mary!" he said appealingly.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "it is cruel! I wish to God I had died before you loved me!"

"You don't know what you are saying; you make me feel—— Why," he demanded under his breath—"why could it never be—in time, if you stay? I will never speak of it any more till you permit it, not a sign shall tell you I am waiting; but by-and-by, if I am patient, will it be always impossible? Dearest, it holds me so fast, this love of you! Don't be harsher than you need be; it is so earnest, so deep. I am not a man to love twice; I never knew I was able to love at all until you taught me. Don't refuse me the right to hope —in secret, by myself: it is all I have, all I will ask of you for years, if you like—the right to think that sometime, perhaps, the day may come when I can take you to me and call you wife; leave me that!"

"I can't," she said thickly; "it would be a lie."

"You could never care for me—not so much as to let *me* care for *you*?"

A movement answered him, and his head was lowered. He sat, his chin supported by his palm, watching the restless working of her hands upon her lap. The closing words of the hymn came out distinctly to them both and they listened till the hush fell, without knowing that they listened.

"One question: I may be wrong to ask you, but your confidence, you know, will be—I shall respect Will you tell me: it is because you love some other man?"

"No, no," she said vehemently, "I do not love!"

"Thank God for that! while your love is in you

own keeping my prayer will always be to win it. So long as you are free you will remain the woman I want and wait for to the end."

Her hands lay quite still. The compulsion for avowal was confronting her at last. To be told this thing and to sanction it by leaving him unenlightened was a guilt she dared not contemplate; and under the obligation to proclaim that, though a tenderness were ever borne to her, they would be divided still, she turned cold and damp. Twice she attempted the finality required, and twice her lips parted without sound.

"Dr. Kincaid!"

He lifted his eyes to her, and the courage faded.

"Don't think," he said, "that I shall ever make you regret replying. You have taken a great dread away from me, and that is all. I am grateful to you."

"Oh," she murmured, in a suffocating voice, "because I do not love is—how am I to explain the—why don't you understand?"

"What is it I should understand?"

"You cannot be grateful; you are mistaken—never in the world, so long as we live—there was someone else. I——"

"Be fair with me," he said sternly; "in common justice, let us have clearness and truth: you have just declared you did not care for anyone?"

"No," she gasped, "I did say that—I meant I did not care—I do not—we neither care; he does not know if I am alive, but—there used to be another man, and——"

"Oh, my God, you are going to tell me you are married!"

She shook her head. His eyes were piercing her; she felt them on her wherever she looked.

"Then speak and be done! 'There was another man;' what more?"

Suddenly the first fear had entered his veins, and, though he was only conscious of a vague oppression, he was already terrified by the anticipation of what he was going to hear.

"'There was another man,'" he repeated hoarsely. "What of him?"

She was leaning forward, stooping so that her face was completely hidden. With the silence that had fallen inside the church the scene seemed quieter than it had been, and the stillness in the air intensified her difficulty of speech. She struggled to evolve from her confusion the phrase to express her impurity; but all the terms looked shameless and unutterable alike, and the travail continued until, sick with the tension of the pause and the violent beating of her heart, she said almost inaudibly:

"I lived with him three years."

CHAPTER X.

SHE heard him catch his breath, and then they sat motionless for a long while, just as they had been sitting when she spoke. Now that she had wrenched the fact out, the poignancy of her suffering subsided; even by degrees she realized that, after this, her leaving the town was inevitable, and her thoughts began to concern themselves vaguely with her future. In him consciousness could never waver from the sound of what she had said; his mind was bound by it. She was impure—her voice had said it, so it was. She had known passion and shame; she had drunk of sensation to the dregs—she herself! The landscape into which he was staring had lost its proportion; the cloud-streaks of the sky and the hue of the distance, everything had altered—she was impure.

The laboured minutes passed; he turned and looked slowly down at the averted profile. Her hands were still lying clasped upon her knee, the curve of cheek was colourless. He watched her for a moment, striving to connect the woman with her words. Something seemed bearing on his brain, so that it did not feel quite near. It did not feel so alive, nor so much his own, as before the vileness of this thing was uttered.

"I have never told you a falsehood," she murmured. "I did not tell you any falsehood in London. Don't

think me all deceit; every word of what I said that day was true."

"I dare say," he answered dully; "I have not accused you."

The change in his tone was pregnant with condemnation to her, and she wondered if he was believing her; but, indeed, he hardly recognised that she had said anything requiring belief. Her assurance appeared puerile to him, incongruous. There was an air almost of unreality about their being seated here as they were, gazing at the blur of churchyard. Something never to be undone had happened, and she was strange.

The service was ended, and, trooping through the door, the Sunday-school pupils clattered past their feet, shiny and clamorous, and eyeing them with sidelong inquisition. She rose nervously, and, rousing himself, he accompanied her between the crowd of children as far as the gate, where their paths diverged. There their steps flagged to a standstill, and for a few seconds both remained looking down the lane in silence.

To her, stunned by no shock to make reality less real, these final seconds held the condensed humiliation of the hour. The rigidity with which the man waited beside her seemed eloquent of disgust, and she mused bitterly on what she had done, how she had abased herself and destroyed his respect, longing the while feverishly to be free of his reproachful presence. He, blanched and voiceless, was scarcely cognizant he still was with her. She yearned for him to go away. On the gravel behind them one of the bigger girls whispered to another, and the other giggled.

She made a slight movement, and he responded

ith something impossible to catch. She did not offer er hand; she did not immediately pity him. Had a ranger told him this thing of her, she would have itied and understood; told him by herself, she under- ood only that she was being despised. They separated ith a mechanical adieu, quietly and slowly. The two irls, who watched them with precocious eagerness, de- ated their relationship.

The road lay before him long and bare, and he ook it lethargically. He continued to hear her words, 'There used to be another man," but he did not know ie heard them—he did not actively pursue any train of hought. It was only in momentary intervals that he ecame aware that he was thinking. The sense of there eing something numbed within him still endured, and as yet his sensation was more of stupor than of pain.

"There used to be another man!" The sentence ung in his ears, and as he went along he awoke to it, he persistence of it touched him; and he began repeat- ng it—mentally, difficultly, trying to spur his mind into omprehension of it, and take it in. He did not suffer cutely even then. There was nothing acute in his eelings whatever. He found it hard to realize, albeit ie did not doubt. She was what she had said she was; ie knew it. But he could not see her so; he could not magine her the woman she had said she used to be. Ie saw her always as she had been to him, composed nd self-contained. The demeanour had been a mask, et it clung to his likeness of her, obscuring the true lentity from him still. He strove to conceive her in er past life, contemning himself because he could not; e wanted to remember he had been loving a disguise;

he wanted to obliterate it. The fact of its having been a disguise all the time, and never she, was so hard to grasp. He tried to look upon her laughing in dishonour, but the picture would not live; it appeared unnatural. It was the inception of his agony: the feeling he had known her so very little that it was her real self which seemed the impossible.

And that other man had known it all—seen every mood of her, learned her in every phase!

"Mary!" he muttered; and was lost in the consciousness that actually he had never known Mary.

He perceived that the man was moving through his thoughts as a dark man, short and suave, and he wondered how the fancy had arisen. Vaguely he commenced to wonder what he had been like indeed. It was too soon to question who he was; he wondered only what he looked like, in a dim mental searching for the presence to connect her with. Grown cognizant of the impression, however, it vanished, and sudden recollections came to him of men he was accustomed to meet.

The manner and the mien of those riveted his attention. It was not by any volition of his own that he considered them; the personalities were insistent. He did not suppose any one of them had been her lover; he knew it was chimerical to view any one of them as such; but his brain had been groping for a man, and these familiar men obtruded themselves vividly. The lurking horror of her impurity materialized, so that the sweat burst out on him. The significance of what he had heard flared red upon his vision. In the flood and grip of that hideous conception masculinity looked

loathsome to him, and he shuddered to associate it with her image. To think it had pleased her to lend herself for the toy of a man's leisure, that some man had been free to make her the boast of his conceit, twisted his heart-strings.

The solidity of the hospital confronted him on the slope he had begun to mount. Beneath him stretched the herbage of cottage gardens somnolent in Sabbath calm. Out of the silence came the quick yapping of a shop-boy's dog, the shrillness of a shop-boy's whistle. They were the only sounds. Then he went in.

That evening Miss Brettan told Mrs. Kincaid she wished to leave her.

The old lady received the announcement without any mark of surprise.

"You know your own mind best," she said meditatively; "but I am sorry you are going—very sorry."

"Yes," said Mary; "I must go. I am sorry to leave you, too, but I can't help myself. I——"

"I used to think you would stop with me always; we got on together so well."

"You have been more than kind to me from the very first day. I shall never forget how kind you have been! If it were only possible!—but it isn't. I——"

Once more the pronoun was the stumbling-block on delicate ground.

"I *can't* stop!" she added thickly; "I hope you will be luckier with your next 'companion'!"

"I shan't have another," answered Mrs. Kincaid; "changes upset me! New things are odious, I think! A new 'companion' would be worse than new boots.

And you must go when it suits you best, you know, since you have to go at all; don't stay on to give me time to make fresh arrangements; I have none to make. Study your own convenience exactly."

"Then, this week?"

"Yes, very well; let it be this week."

They said no more, and the subject dropped until the following afternoon, when Mrs. Kincaid broached it abruptly.

"What are you going to do, Miss Brettan?" she inquired. "Have you anything else in view?"

"No," replied Miss Brettan hesitatingly; "not yet."

The suppression of her motive made plain speaking difficult to both.

"I have no doubt, though," she added, "that I shall be all right."

"What a pity it is! What a pity it is, to be sure!"

"Oh, you mustn't grieve about me!" she exclaimed; "it isn't worth that! *I'm* not worth it! You know—you know, so many women have to make a living in the world; and they do make it, somehow; it's only one more!"

"And so many women find they can't! Tell me, *must* you go? Are you quite sure you're not exaggerating the necessity? I don't ask you your reasons. I never meddle in people's private affairs. But are you sure you aren't looking on anything in a false light, and going to extremes?"

"Oh!" responded Mary, carried into sudden candour, "do you suppose I do not shiver at the prospect? Do you suppose it attracts me? I'm not a girl; I'm not quixotic; I *can't* stop here!"

The elder woman sighed.

"Why couldn't you care for such a good fellow as my son?" she thought. "Then there would have been none of this bother for any of us!"

"I hope you'll be fortunate," she said gently. "Anything I can do to help you of course I will."

"Thank you!" said Mary.

"I mean, you mustn't scruple to refer to me; it's your only chance. Without any references——"

"Yes, I know too well how indispensable they are; but——"

"You have been here two years. I shall say I should have liked it to remain your home."

"Thank you," said Mary again; but she was by no means certain whether she could honestly avail herself of this recommendation given in ignorance of the truth. It was precisely the matter she had been revolving in her mind. The doctor might forbid its being accorded if she attempted to do so, and she was loath to be indebted for testimony from the mother which the son would know to be undeserved, whether he proclaimed her unworthiness or no: she wanted her renunciation to be complete. And yet, without this source of aid—— She trembled. How speedily the few pounds in her possession would vanish! how soon there would be a revival of her past experience, with all its frightfulness and squalor! In imagination she was already footsore, adrift amid the heartless bustle of the London streets.

"Mrs. Kincaid!" she cried. A passionate impulse seized her to declare everything. If she had been seventeen, she would have knelt at the old woman's

feet; for it is not so much the vehemence of our moods that diminishes with time as the power of restraint which increases. "Mrs. Kincaid! you must know—you must guess why——"

"I know nothing," said the old woman quickly; "I do not guess!" The colour sank from her face, and Mary had never heard her speak with so much energy. "My son shall tell me—I have a son—I will not hear from you!"

"I beg your pardon," said Mary; and they were silent.

The same evening Mrs. Kincaid sent a message to the hospital, asking the doctor to come round to her.

There had been no intimation of this intention of hers, and her companion witnessed her instructions to the servant with a little shock. She apprehended, however, that they were delivered in her presence of design, and when it became possible for him to arrive she withdrew.

He came with misgivings and with relief. The last twenty-four hours had inclined him to the state of tension in which the unexpected is always the portentous, but in which one waits, nevertheless, for something unlooked-for to occur. He did not know what he dreaded to hear, but the summons alarmed him, even while he welcomed it for permitting him to go to the house.

He threw a rapid glance round the parlour, and replied to his mother's greeting with quick interrogation.

"What has happened?"

"Nothing of grave importance has happened. I want to speak to you."

"I was afraid something was the matter," he said, more easily. "What is it?"

He took the seat opposite to her, and she was dismayed to observe the alteration in him. She contemplated him a few seconds irresolutely.

"Philip," she said, "this afternoon Miss Brettan was anxious to tell me something; she wanted to make me her confidant. And I would not listen to her."

"Oh!" he said. "And you would not listen to her?"

"No, I would not listen to her. I said, 'My son shall tell me, or I will not hear.' This afternoon I had no more idea of sending to you than you had of coming. But I have been thinking it over. She is in your mother's house, and she is the woman you love. You do love her, Philip?"

"I asked her to be my wife," he answered simply.

"I thought so. And she has refused you?"

"Yes, she refused me. If I have not told you earlier, it was because she refused me. To have spoken of it would have been to give pain—needless pain—to you and to her."

Mrs. Kincaid considered.

"You are quite right," she admitted; "your mistake was to suppose I should not see it for myself." She turned her eyes from him, and looked ostentatiously in another direction. "Now," she added, "she is going away! Perhaps you already knew, but——"

"No," he replied, "I did not know. I thought it likely, but I did not know. I understand why it was you sent for me."

He got up and went across to her, and kissed her on the brow.

"I understand why you sent for me," he repeated. "What a tender little mother it is; and to lose her 'companion,' too!"

Where he leant beside her over her chair, she could not see how white his face had grown.

"Are we going to let her go, Phil?"

He stroked her hand.

"I am afraid we must let her go, mother, since she does not wish to stop."

"You do not mean to interfere, then? You won't do anything to prevent it?"

"I am not able to prevent it," he rejoined coldly. "I have not the authority."

"Indeed!" murmured Mrs. Kincaid. "It seems I might have spared my pains."

"No," said her son; "your pains were well taken. I am very glad you have spoken to me—or, rather, I am very glad to have spoken to you—for you know now I meant no wrong by my silence."

"But—but, Philip——"

"But Miss Brettan must go, mother, because she wishes it."

"I do not understand you," exclaimed Mrs. Kincaid, bewildered. "I never thought you would care for any woman at all; you never struck me as the sort of man, somehow; but now that you do care, you can't surely mean you think it right for the woman to leave the only place where she has any friends, and go out into the world by herself! Don't you say you are in love with her?"

"I asked Miss Brettan to marry me," he answered. "Since you put the question, I do think it right for her to leave the place; I think every woman would wish to leave under the circumstances. I consider it would be indelicate to stay her."

"Your sense of delicacy is very acute for a lover," said the old lady grimly; "much too fine a thing to be comfortable. And I'll tell you what is greater still—your pride. Don't imagine you take me in by your pretended calmness for a moment; look behind you in the glass, and ask yourself if it's likely."

He had moved apart from her, and now was lounging on the hearth; but he did not attempt to follow her advice, nor did he deny the implication.

"I look pretty bad," he allowed, "I know. But you are quite mistaken, for all that; my pride has nothing to do with it."

"You are making yourself ill at the prospect of losing her, and yet you won't—— Not but what she must be mad to reject you, certainly! I am not standing up for her, don't think it! I don't say I wanted to see you fond of her; I should have preferred to see you marry someone who would have been of use to you, and helped you in your career. You might have done a great deal better, and I am sure I understand that you should have a proper pride in the matter, and object to begging her to remain. But, after all, if you do find so much in this particular woman that you are going to be miserable without her, why, *I* can say something to induce her to stop."

"To the woman you would prefer me not to marry!" he said wearily. "But you must not do it, mother."

"I do want to see you marry her, Philip; I want to see you happy. You don't follow me a bit. Since the dread of her loss can make you look like that, you mustn't lose her; that's what I say."

"I *have* lost her," he returned; "I follow you very well. You think I might have married a princess, and you would have viewed that with a little pang too. You would give me to Miss Brettan with a big pang, but you would give me to her because you think I want her."

"That is it—not a very big pang, either; I know every man is the best judge of his own life. Indeed, it ought not to be a pang at all; I don't think it *is* a pang, only a tiny—— Her son's sweetheart is always the mother's rival just at first, Phil; and I suppose it's always the mother's fault. But one day, when you're married to Mary, and a boy of your own falls in love with a strange girl, your wife will tell you how *she* feels. She'll explain it to you better than I can, and then you'll know how *your* mother felt, and it won't seem so unnatural."

"Oh," he said, "hush! Don't! I shall never be married to Mary."

"Yes," she declared, "you will. When you say that, you're not the 'best judge' any longer; it isn't judgment, it's pique, and I'm not going to have your life spoiled by pique and the want of resolution. Phil, Phil, you're the last man in the world I should have thought would allow a thing he wanted to slip through his fingers. And a woman—women always say 'no,' to begin with. It's not the girls who are to be had for the asking who make the best wives; the ones who are hardest to win

are generally the worthiest to hold. Don't accept her answer, Phil! I'll persuade her to stay on, and at first you needn't come very often—I won't mind any more, I shall know what it means—and when you do come, I'll help you and tell you what to do. She *shall* get fond of you; you *shall* have the woman you want—I promise her to you!"

"Mother," he said—the pallor had touched his lips—"for pity's sake don't say that! Don't go on talking of what can't be. It is no misunderstanding to be made up; it isn't any courtship to be aided. I tell you you can no more give me Mary Brettan for my wife than you can give my childhood back to me out of eternity."

"And I tell you I will," she averred. "'Faint-heart'—you know what the proverb says! But you shall have your 'fair lady' for all that; yes, instead of—you remember what we used to say to you when you were a little boy: 'There's a monkey up your back, Phil!'—you shall have your fair lady instead of the monkey that's up your back! It's a full-grown monkey to-night, so that you're much too obstinate to listen to reason. By-and-by you will own you were wrong. She is suited to you; the more I think about it, the more convinced I am she would make you comfortable. You might have thrown yourself away on some flighty girl without a thought beyond her hats and frocks! And she is interested in your profession, you have always been able to talk to her about it; she understands these things better than I do."

"Listen to me," exclaimed Kincaid with repressed passion, "listen to me, and remember what you said

just now, that I am a man—to judge for myself! You must not ask Miss Brettan to stay, and you are not to think it is her going makes me unhappy. My hope is over. Between her and me there would never be any marriage if she remained for years. Everything was said, and it was answered, and it is done."

He bit the end from a cigar, and smoked a little before he spoke any more. When he did speak, his tones were quite under control; anyone from whom his countenance was hidden would have pronounced the words stronger than the feeling that dictated them.

"Something else: after to-night don't talk to me about her. I don't want to hear; it is not pleasant to me. If you want to prove your affection, prove it by that. While she remains, I cannot see you; when she is gone let it be, in our talks together, as if she had never been."

The aspect of the man showed of what a tremendous strain this affected calmness was the outcome. Indeed, the deliberateness of the utterance, even more than the utterance itself, hushed his listener into a conviction of his sincerity, which was disquieting because she found it so inexplicable. She smoothed the folds of her gown; casting at him, from time to time, glances full of wistfulness and pity, and at last she said, in the voice of a person who resigns herself to bewilderment:

"Well, of course I will do as you wish. But you have both very queer notions of what is right, that is certain; help seems equally repugnant to the pair of you."

"Why do you say that?" inquired the doctor. "What help has Miss Brettan declined?"

"She was reluctant to refer anybody to me, I thought, when I chanced to mention the matter to-day. But I suppose that was another instance of delicacy that is over my head."

"The reference? Do you mean she will not use it?"

"She gave me the idea of being very doubtful of doing so. I said: 'Without any references, what on earth will become of you?' And she replied: 'Yes, she understood that: but——' But something; I forget exactly what it was now!"

"But that is insane!" he said imperatively. "She is helpless without it. She has been your 'companion,' and you have had no fault to find with her: you can conscientiously declare as much."

He rose, and shook his coat clear of the ash which had fallen in a lump from the cigar.

"Nothing that has passed between Miss Brettan and me can affect her right to your testimony to the two years she has lived with you," he added. "I should like her to know I said so."

"I will tell her," affirmed his mother. "What are you going to do?"

"It is getting late! . . . By the way, there is another thing: it will be a long while before she finds herself a home at the best; she mustn't think I have anything to do with it, but I want her to take some money before she goes, to keep her from distress. . . . Where did I leave my hat?"

"You want me to persuade her to take some money, as if it came from me?"

"Yes, as if it were from you—fifty pounds—to keep her from distress. . . . Did I hang it up outside?"

His mother went across to him, and put her arms about his neck. "Can you spare so much, Philip?"

"I have been putting by," he said, "for some time."

CHAPTER XI.

UNACQUAINTED with Kincaid's dictum, Mary spent the evening in grave anxiety. The formless future before her, if she declined to avail herself of his mother's recommendation, was a terror she could not banish, and she was unable to evolve any definite line of action out of the chaos on which to sustain a hope.

She sank later into a troubled sleep, from which she awoke suddenly with a startled sense of something having happened. After a few seconds, the impression was verified by a repetition of the cause. The hollow jangling of a bell broke the silence of the house, and nervous investigation proved it to be a summons to the old lady's room.

Mrs. Kincaid explained that she was feeling very unwell—an explanation that was corroborated by her voice—and, kindling a light, Mary was surprised to perceive she was shivering violently.

"I can't stop it; and I am so cold. I don't know what it is; I feel as if cold water were running down my back."

Her companion looked at her quickly. "We will put some more blankets on the bed," she answered; "wait a minute while I run upstairs."

She returned with the clothes from her own, and piled them upon the quilt.

"You will be warmer presently," she said; "you must have taken a slight chill."

Mrs. Kincaid lay mute awhile.

"I have such a pain!" she murmured. "How could I have taken a chill?"

"Where is your pain?"

"In my side—a sharp, stabbing pain."

The servant now appeared at the door, alarmed by the disturbance, and Mary told her to bring some coals, and then to dress herself as promptly as she could.

"Is there any linseed?—or oatmeal will do. I must make Mrs. Kincaid a poultice."

"I'll see, miss. There's some linseed, I think, but——"

"Fetch it, please," said Mary, "and a kettle. We'll light the fire at once, and then I can make it up here."

The old lady moaned and shivered by turns, and a little difficulty was experienced in getting the fire to burn. Mary attempted to draw the flicker into a blaze by the aid of a newspaper, while the servant advanced theories on the subject of the stove, affirming that, in her time at least, it had never been used.

When a glow had been obtained at length, and it was possible for the poultice to be applied, Miss Brettan sent her down for a hot-water bottle and the whisky.

"You will be so comfortable directly, you won't know what to make of it!" she said brightly to the invalid. "Something warm to drink, and the hot flannel to your feet—you'll feel a different being!"

"So cold I am, it's bitter—and the pain! I can't think what it can be!"

"Let me put this on for you, then; it's all ready. It won't—is that it?—there!—how's that?"

"Oh!" faltered Mrs. Kincaid, "oh, thank you! Ah! you do it very nicely!"

"See!" said Mary, her fingers busy, "and here we have the rest of the luxuries! Give me the tumbler, Ellen, and we'll do that first." She mixed the stimulant, and carried it to the bedside. "Just raise your head!" she murmured; "I'll hold the glass for you, so that you won't have to sit up. Take this, now, and Ellen will get the bottle ready while you're sipping it."

"There isn't much in the kettle, miss," said Ellen. "I don't——"

"Use what there is, and fill it up again; and then see if you can find me any brown paper."

In quest of the brown paper, Ellen was absent some time, and, having set down the empty tumbler and arranged the clothing about the recumbent figure more tidily, Miss Brettan proceeded to search for the requisite herself.

She found a sheet lining one of the drawers she opened, and, shifting it from beneath the handkerchiefs and cuffs, rolled it into a tube, which she affixed to the spout of the kettle to direct the steam into the room. She had not long done this when the girl returned disconsolate to say there was not such a thing in the house. Mary joined her on the stairs. No parcel such as they used brown paper for had been sent home lately, she averred. There was the paper the sugar came in, and the tea; but that was blue paper, and she could not find any of it, besides. "Are you going to sit in there all night, miss?"

"Speak lower! Yes, I shall sit up. What time is it?" The servant said it was just on half-past four, which had astonished her a good deal when she had learnt it by the kitchen clock, as she had supposed it to be about one at the latest. "I want you to go and fetch the doctor, Ellen; I am afraid Mrs. Kincaid is going to be ill."

"Now at once, miss?"

"Yes, at once. Tell him his mother is unwell, and it would be better for him to see her. Bring him back with you. You aren't frightened to go out; it must be getting light?"

They drew up the blind of the landing window, and saw daylight creeping over the next door yard.

"Frightened! not me! And if I was I'd run an errand for you, miss! Do you think she's going to be very bad?"

"I don't know; I can't tell. Hurry, Ellen, there's a good girl! get back as quickly as you can!"

A deep flush had overspread the face upon the pillows. The eyes yearned, and an agonized expression, as Miss Brettan took her seat by the curtains again, strengthened her belief in the gravity of the seizure, which she dreaded might be the commencement of inflammation of the lungs. Three-quarters of an hour must be allowed for Kincaid to arrive, and, conscious she could now do nothing but wait, the time lagged fearfully. The silence, banished at the earlier pealing of the bell, had regained its dynasty, and once more a wide hush settled upon the house, indicated by the occasional clicking of a cinder on the fender. At intervals the sick woman uttered a tremulous sigh, and

met Mary's gaze with a look of appeal, as if she recognised in her presence a kind of protective sympathy; but she had ceased to complain, and the watcher abstained from any active demonstration. In the globe beside the mirror the gas flared brightly, and this, coupled with the heat of the fire, filled the room with a moist radiance against which the narrow line of dawn above the window-sill grew slowly more defined. The advent had been long expected, when sharp footfalls on the pavement, ringing momentarily louder, smote Mary's ear at last, and, forgetting Kincaid had his own key, she sprang up to let him in. The hall-door swung back, and she paused with her hand on the banisters. He came swiftly forward, and passed her with a hurried salutation on the stairs.

There was no anxiety, however, visible on the countenance with which he approached the bed. A little genial concern showed merely, such as it had worn when he had been told his mother had neuralgia, and the tone in which he addressed her seemed, by its matter-of-fact cheerfulness, to imply he understood and inwardly depreciated the patient's dread of detailing any serious symptoms. His questions were put encouragingly; when a reply was given he listened with the air of confidence confirmed.

"Am I very ill?" she gasped.

"You *feel* very ill, I dare say, dear; but don't go persuading yourself you *are*, or that will be a real trouble!"

He had his fingers on her pulse as he spoke, and a smile on his lips. Yet he knew that her life was in danger. He had, in brief, mastered the art of acting

on the noblest stage—the acting of a clever physician in a sick-room.

Mary stood on the threshold watching him.

"Who put that funnel to the kettle?" he inquired, without turning. He had not appeared to notice it.

"I did," she answered. "Is it to remain?"

"Yes; leave it."

He signed to her she was to go below, and after a few minutes followed her into the parlour.

"Give me a pen and ink, Miss Brettan, please."

"They are on the table," she said, "by the blotting-pad."

He sat down and wrote hastily, rising with the paper held out.

"Where is Ellen?"

"She is here, waiting to take the prescription."

A trace of surprise escaped his stiffness. Then he said curtly:

"You are thoughtful. Was it you who put on that poultice?"

The tone of her affirmative was as distant as his.

"We did what we could until you arrived; *I* put on the poultice. Did I do right?"

"Quite right. It was the way it was put on that made me ask."

With that expression of approval he left her, returning to his mother, and until the girl came back from the chemist's Mary remained where she was. She then thought of attempting to complete her toilette, but, unaware from minute to minute when she might be called, was forced to abandon the notion, and occupied herself by righting the disorder of the room. She had thrown

on a loosely-fitting morning dress of cashmere, one of the first things she had made herself after her instalment, and, though she had snatched an instant in the meanwhile to immerse her face in water, had been able to do but little to her hair, the coil of which still retained much of the scattered softness of the night. It was now possible to rectify this, at least, and Ellen brought her the necessary pins. She stood on the hearth before the looking-glass, shaking the mass of hair about her shoulders, and then with uplifted arms winding it deftly upon her head. The supple femininity of the attitude, so suggestive of recent rising, had, with the earliness of the sunshine that tinged the parlour, a certain harmony, and when Kincaid re-entered and found her so, he could not but be sensible of the impression, albeit he was indisposed to dwell upon it.

As he came in she looked round quickly:

"How is Mrs. Kincaid, doctor?"

"I am very uneasy about her. I am going back to the hospital now to arrange to stay here."

"What do you think has caused it?"

"I am afraid she got damp and cold in the garden on Sunday."

"And it has gone to the lungs?"

"It has affected the left lung, yes."

She dropped the last pin, and as she stooped for it the swirl of the gown displayed a bare instep.

"I can help to nurse her, unless you prefer to send someone else?"

"You will do very well, I think," he answered; and he proceeded to give her some instructions.

She fulfilled these instructions with a capability he

found astonishing, though there was little astonishing in her competence, in fact. Before the day had worn through he perceived that, however her training had been acquired, he possessed in her a coadjutrix reliable and adroit, and the unexplained ability continued to amaze him after the discovery was made. She was, to herself, once more within her native province, but to him it was as if she had become suddenly voluble in a foreign tongue. He had no inclination to meditate upon her skill—to meditate about her at all was the last thing he desired now—but there were moments when her performance of some duty supplied fresh food for wonder notwithstanding, and he noted her dexterity with curious eyes. He had, though, refrained from any further commendation, the gratitude he might have spoken being checked by the aloofness of her manner; and, in the closer association consequent upon the illness, the formality that had sprung up between them suffered no decrease. It became, indeed, permanent in the contact which both would have shunned.

After the one opportunity, during which she had left the choice to him, she had afforded him no chance to resume their earlier relations had he wished it, and the studied politeness of her address was a persistent reminder that she directed herself to him in his medical capacity alone. In her own mind she held the present the least exacting conditions attainable, since the distastefulness of renewed intercourse was not to be avoided altogether; but she in nowise exonerated him for imposing them, and she considered that by having done so he had made her a singularly ungracious return for the humiliation of her avowal. She sustained the

note he had struck; the key was in a degree congenial to her. But she resented while she concurred, and even more than to her judgment her acquiescence was attributable to her pride.

On the day following there were recurrences of pain, but on Wednesday this subsided, though the temperature remained high. Mary observed that Kincaid's anxiety was, if anything, keener than it had been, and by degrees a latent admiration began to mingle with her bitterness. In the atmosphere of the sick-room the man and the woman were equally new to each other, and up to a certain point he was as great a surprise to her as she was to him. She saw him now professionally for the first time, and she recognised his resources, his despatch, with an appreciation quickened by experience. The visitor she had known lounging, loose-limbed and conversational, in an armchair had disappeared; the suppliant for a tenderness she did not feel had become an authority whom she obeyed. Here, like this, the man was a power, and the change which came over him seemed a physical one. His figure was braced, his movements had a resolution and a vigour that gave him another personality. He even awed her slightly. She thought he must look sterner to all the world in the exercise of his vocation, but she thought also everyone in the world would approve the difference.

The confidence he inspired in the beholder was so strong that on Thursday, when he told her he intended to have a consultation, she heard him with a certain shock.

"You think it advisable?"

"I fear the worst, Miss Brettan; I can't neglect any chance."

She held some violets in her hands—it was her custom to brighten the outlook from the bed with fresh flowers every morning—and for an appreciable space her acutest consciousness was of the faint scent stealing up into her face.

"Do you mean she won't recover?" she said at last thickly.

"God grant my opinion's wrong!" he replied. "Will you ask the girl to take the wire for me?"

It was to a physician in the county town he had decided to telegraph, one whose prestige was gradually widening, and of the class whose reputations have been built on something trustier than a cultivated eccentricity of manner and a chance summons to the couch of a notability. Mary had heard the name before, and she strove to persuade herself another view of the case might prove more promising. The day which had opened so gloomily, however, offered during the succeeding hours small food for faith. Towards noon the sufferer became abruptly restless, and the united efforts of doctor and nurse were required to soothe her. She was fired by a passionate longing to get up, and pleaded piteously for permission. To walk about a little while was her one appeal, and the strenuousness with which she urged the entreaty was rendered more pathetic by her obvious belief that they refused her because they failed to comprehend the violence of the desire. She endeavoured with failing energy to make it known, and, at length prevailed upon to desist, lay back with a look in her eyes which was a lamentation

of her helplessness. Later slight delirium intervened, and she rambled in confused phrases of her son and her companion—his courtship and Mary's indifference. The man and the woman sat on either side of her, but their gaze no longer met. At the first reference to his attachment the latter had started painfully, but now by a strong effort her nervousness had been suppressed, and from time to time she moved to wipe the fevered lips and brow with a semblance of self-possession. While the day-beams waned the disjointed sentences grew rarer. The doctor went below, and silence, save for the deep breathing, fell again, until suddenly, as dusk gathered, the words "I feel much better" were uttered in a tone of restored tranquillity. Wheeling round, Mary saw that her ears had not deceived her. The declaration was repeated with a feeble smile. The features had gained a touch of the cheerfulness which had been so remarkable in the voice. The eyes soon afterwards closed in what appeared to be slumber. Kincaid had not come up when this occurred.

He was striding backwards and forwards, his arms locked across his breast. As Mary ran in he turned sharply, with lifted head.

"She feels much better," she exclaimed; "she has fallen asleep."

He stood still, in the middle of the room, never speaking.

"She feels m—— Oh!" She shrank back with a stifled cry, staring at him in the twilight. "I have never seen—I—— Is it *that?*"

"Hush!" he said, scarcely above a whisper. And

she understood what she had told him was the presage of death.

After this, both knew it to be but a matter of time. The arrival of the physician served merely to confirm despondency. He pronounced the case hopeless, and, reluctantly accepting a fee to reimburse the expenses of the journey, bade Kincaid farewell with an expression of sympathy in which an allusion to their profession was not inaptly blended.

"I wish you could have associated our meeting with happier circumstances," he said. "If anything can mitigate your sorrow, it must be the reflection that you were able to do everything that could be done yourself."

A page with a message of inquiry came up the steps as he left; indeed, such messages had been delivered daily. But on Saturday, when the baker's man brought the bread to Laburnum Lodge, he found the blinds drawn down; and within a few minutes of his handing the loaf to the weeping servant through the scullery window, the news was circulating through Westport that Mrs Kincaid had died unconscious at seven that morning.

While the baker's man derived this intelligence from the housemaid, Mary was behind the lowered blinds on the first floor, crying. She had just descended from her own apartment, whither she had retired soon after the end. She had seen how deeply Philip was affected, and had withdrawn from him as speedily as might be. He had not shed tears—he was not the man to break down had he been alone—but that he was strongly moved was evident by the quivering muscles of

his mouth; and the drawn face of which she had had a glimpse kept recurring to her vividly.

He came in while she sat there. He was very pale, but now his countenance was under control again.

She rose, and advanced towards him irresolutely. "I am so sorry! She was a very kind friend to me."

He put out his hand. For the first time since she had met him after posting the note hers lay in it.

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you, too, for all you did for her; I shall always remember it gratefully, Miss Brettan."

He seemed on the point of adding something, but checked himself, and presently made reference to the arrangements which must be seen to. That night he reoccupied his quarters in the hospital, nor did they come together excepting in odd minutes during the day. She, however, found space to mention that she purposed remaining until the funeral, and to this announcement he bowed, though he refrained from framing any inquiry as to her plans for afterwards. Indeed, "plans" would have been a curious misnomer for the thoughts in her brain. The question she had earlier revolved had been settled effectually by the death, and now that all possibility of recommendation had been removed, her plight admitted of nothing but conjecture.

In her solitude in the house of mourning, unbroken save for interruptions which emphasized the ghastliness of what had happened, or by some colloquy with the red-eyed servant, she passed her hours lethargic and weary. The week of suspense and insufficient rest had tired her out, and she no longer even sought to consider. Her mind drifted. A fancy that often came to

her was that it would be a delightful thing to be far away, lying in a cornfield in the hot sunshine, with a vault of blue above her. The picture looked to her sweet, with infinite peace. It was present with her more frequently than the impending horrors of the seething capital.

How much the week had held! what changes it had seen! She sat musing on this next evening, listening to the church bells, and remembering that a Sunday ago the dead woman had been beside her. Last Sunday there was still a prospect of Westport continuing to be her home for years. Last Sunday it was that in the churchyard she had confessed her past. Only a week —how full, how difficult to realize! She was half dozing when she heard the hall-door unlocked, and Kincaid greeted her as she roused herself.

"Did I disturb you? were you asleep?"

"No; I was thinking, that is all."

He sighed, and dropped into the opposite chair. She noted his harassed aspect, and pitied him. The Sunday previous she had not been sensible of any pity at all. She understood his loss of his mother; the loss of his faith had represented much less to her, being a faith on which she personally had set small store.

"There is plenty to think of!" he said wearily.

"You haven't seen Ellen, doctor, have you? She has been asking for you."

"Has she? what does she want?"

"She is anxious to know how long she will be retained. Her sister is in service somewhere, and the family want a parlourmaid on the first of the month.

I am sorry to bother you with trifles now, but she asked me to speak to you."

"I must talk to her. Of course the house will be sold off; there is no one to keep it on for. How fagged you look! are you taking proper care of yourself again?"

"Oh yes; it is just the reaction, nothing but what will soon pass."

"You did not have the relief you ought to have had; you worked like two people."

He paused, and his gaze dwelt on her inquiringly. She read the inquiry with such clearness that when he spoke the words seemed but an echo of the pause.

"How did you know so much?" he said.

"After I lost my father I was nurse in the Yaughton Hospital for several years."

The answer was direct, but it was brief. Half a dozen queries sprang to his lips in the ensuing seconds, and were in turn repressed. Her past was her own; he confined his questions to her future.

"And what do you propose to do now?"

"I am going to London."

"Do you anticipate any obstacles to resuming your old occupation?"

"I think you know that I have found obstacles."

"I have no wish to force your confidence," he said diffidently.

"I haven't my certificate."

"You can refer to the matron."

"I know I can; I will not. I told you two years ago there were persons I could refer to, and I would not do it."

"May I ask your objection to referring to this one?"

She was silent.

"Won't you tell me?"

"I think you might understand," she said in a very low voice. "I went there after my father's death. I am not the woman who left the Yaughton Hospital."

His eyes fell, and he stared abstractedly at the grate. When he raised them he saw that hers had closed. He looked at her lingeringly till they opened—

"Now that *she* is gone," he exclaimed unsteadily, "your position is a very difficult one! Have you any prospect that you do not mention?"

She shook her head.

"Is there anything you can suggest? Any way out of the difficulty that occurs to you? Believe me——"

"No," she said, "I can see nothing that is practicable; I——"

"Would you be willing to come on the nursing-staff here? We are short-handed in the night work. It is an opening, and it might lead to a permanent appointment."

Her heart began to beat rapidly; for an instant she did not reply.

"It is very considerate of you, very generous; but I am afraid that would not do."

"Why not?"

"It would not do, because I should have left Westport in any case—of my own accord."

"You had the intention, I'm aware. But between the manner of your leaving Westport if my mother had lived, and the way you would leave it now, there is a vast difference."

"I must leave it, all the same."

"Pardon me," he said; "I cannot permit you to do so. I would not permit any woman to go out into the world with the knowledge she went to meet certain distress. Your hospital experience appears to me to present a very natural solution to the dilemma. You could come on next week. If your reluctance is attributable to myself—hear me out, I must speak plainly—if you refuse because what has passed between us makes every further conversation a pain to you, you have only to recollect that conversation between us in the hospital will necessarily be of the very briefest kind. All that *I* recollect is that I have asked you to be my wife, and you do not care for me—I am the man you have rejected. I wish, though, to be something more serviceable: I wish to be your friend. In the hospital I shall have little chance, for there, to all intents and purposes, we shall be as much divided as if indeed you went to London. While the chance does exist I want to use it. I want to advise you strongly to adopt the course I propose. Acceptance, bear in mind, need in no way prevent you attempting to find a post elsewhere; it would, on the contrary, facilitate your obtaining one."

Her hand had shaded her brow as she listened; now it sank slowly to her lap.

"I need hardly tell you I am grateful," she said, in tones that struggled to be firm. "Anyone must be grateful; to me the offer is very—is more than good." Her composure broke down. "I know what I must seem to you; you have heard nothing but the worst of me," she exclaimed.

"I would hear nothing that it hurt you to say," he

answered; and for a minute neither of them said any more. There had been a gentleness in his last words that touched her keenly; the appeal in hers had stirred the soul of him. Neither spoke, but the man's breath rose eagerly, and the woman's head drooped lower and lower on her breast.

"Let me!" she said at last in a whisper his pulses leaped to meet. "It was there—when I was nurse. He was a patient. Before he left he asked me to marry him; I was to go to him in a few weeks. When I went he told me he was married already. Until then there had been no hint, not the faintest suspicion—I went to him, with the knowledge of them all, to be his wife."

"Thank God!" said the other in his throat.

"She was—she had been on the streets; he had not seen her for years. He prayed to me, implored me—— Oh, I am not trying to exonerate myself! I am not trying to shift the sin on to him; but if the truest devotion of her life can plead for a woman, Heaven knows that plea was mine!"

"And at the end of the three years?"

"There was news of her death, and he married someone else."

She got abruptly up, and moved to the window, looking out from behind the blind.

"I can't tell you how I feel for you," he said huskily. "I can't give you an idea how deeply, how earnestly I sympathize!"

"Don't say anything," she murmured; "you need not try: I think I understand to-night—you proved your sympathy while the claim on it was least."

"And you will let me help you?"

The slender figure stood motionless; behind her the man was gripping the leather of his chair.

"If I may," she said constrainedly, "if I can go there like—as you—ah, if the past can all be buried, and there need be no reminder of what has been!"

"I will be everything you wish, everything that you would have me seem!"

He took a sudden step towards her. She turned, her eyes humid with tears, with thankfulness, with entreaty. He stopped short, drew back, and resumed his seat.

"Now, what were you saying about Ellen?" he inquired.

And perhaps it was the plainest avowal he had ever made her of his love.

CHAPTER XII.

So it happened that Mary Brettan did not leave Westport the next week, and that after a few months she was more than ever doubtful if she would leave it at all. The suggested vacancy on the permanent staff had occurred before then, and, once having accepted the post, there seemed no inducement to woo anxiety by resigning it.

At first the resumption of routine after years of indolence was irksome and exhausting. The six o'clock rising, the active duties commencing while she still felt tired, the absence of anything like privacy excepting in the two hours allotted to each nurse for leisure—all these things fretted her. The relief she derived from her escape into the open air was itself alloyed by the knowledge that outdoor exercise during one of the hours was compulsory. Then, too, it was inevitable that a costume worn once more should recall the emotions with which she had laid aside her last; inevitable that she should ask herself what the years had done for her since last she stood within a hospital, and bade it farewell with the belief she was never going to enter one again. The evolution of fate which had cast her back into her original surroundings accentuated the failure of the interval. Her heart had contracted when, directed to the strange apartment above the wards, she beheld

the print dress provided for her use lying limp upon a chair. An unutterable forlornness filled her soul as, proceeding to put it on, she surveyed her reflection in the narrow glass. Yet she grew accustomed to the change, and the more easily for its being a revival.

The speed with which the sense of novelty wore off indeed astonished her. Primarily dismaying, and a continuous burden upon which she condoled with herself every day, it was next as if she had lost it one night in her sleep. She had forgotten it until the lightness with which she was fulfilling the work struck her with swift surprise. Little by little a certain enjoyment in its performance was even felt. She contemplated some impending task with interest. She took her walk with zest in lieu of relief. She returned to the doors exhilarated instead of depressed. The Bohemian, the lady-companion, had become a sick-nurse anew, and because the primary groove of life is the one which cuts the deepest lines, her existence rolled along the recovered rut with smoothness. The scenes between which it lay were not beautiful, but they were familiar; the view it commanded was monotonous, but she no longer sought to travel.

Socially the conditions had been favoured by her introduction. The position she had occupied in Laburnum Lodge gave her a factitious value, and gained her the friendliness of the matron, a functionary who has the power to make the hospital-nurse distinctly uncomfortable, and who has on occasion been known (by the hospital-nurse) to use it. It commended her also to the other nurses, two of whom were gentlewomen, insomuch as it promised an agreeable variety to conversation in

the sitting-room. She was by no means unconscious of the extent of her debt to Kincaid, and her gratitude as time went on increased rather than diminished. Certainly the environment was conducive to a perception of his merits, more conducive even than had been the period of his attendance at the villa. The king is nowhere so attractive as at his court; the preacher nowhere so impressive as in the pulpit. Ashore the captain may bore us, but we all like to smoke our cigars with him on his ship. The poorest pretender assumes importance in the circle of his adherents, and poses with authority on some small platform, if it be only his mother's hearthrug. Here where the doctor was the guiding spirit, and Mary found his praises upon every tongue, the glow of gratitude was fanned by the breath of popularity. In fact, had he deliberately planned a means of raising himself in her esteem, he could have devised none better than this of placing her as inmate of the miniature kingdom that he ruled. In remembering he had wanted to marry her, she was sensible one day of a thrill of pride: nothing like regret, nothing like arrogance, but a momentary pride. She felt more dignity in the moment.

If he remembered it too, however, no word he spoke evinced such recollection. The promise he had made to her had been kept to the letter, and the past was never alluded to between them. As doctor and nurse their colloquies were brief and practical. It was the demeanour he adopted towards her from the date of her instalment which added the first fuel to her thankfulness, and if, withal, she was inclined to review his generosity rather than to regard it, it was because he

had established the desired relations on so firm a footing that she ceased to believe the pursuance of it cost him any pains. That she had held his love after the story of her shame she was aware; but that on reflection he could still want her for his wife she did not for an instant suppose, and she often thought that by degrees his attitude had become the one most natural to him.

By what a denial of nature, by what rigid self-restraint, the idea had been conveyed, nobody but the man himself could have told. No one else knew the bitterness of the suffering that had been endured to give her that feeling of right to remain; what impulses had been curbed and crushed back, that no scruples or misgivings should cross her peace. The circumstances under which they met now helped him much, or he would have failed despite his efforts, and to fail, he understood, would be to prove unworthy of her trust; it would be to see her go out from his life for ever. Still want her? So intensely, so devoutly did he want her, that, shadowed by sin as she was, she was holier to him than any other woman upon earth—fairer than any other gift at God's bestowal. He would have taken her to his heart with as profound a reverence as if no shame had ever touched her. If all the world had been cognizant of her disgrace, he would have triumphed to cry "My wife!" in the ears of all the world. A baser love might well have thirsted for her too, but it would have had its hours of hesitation. Kincaid's had none. No flood of passion blinded his higher judgment and urged him on; no qualms of convention intervened and gave him pause. It was with his higher judgment that

he prayed for her. His love burned steadily, clearly. The situation lacked only one essential for the ideal: the love of the penitent he longed to raise. The complement was missing. The fallen woman who had confessed her guilt, the man's devotion that had withstood the test—these were there. But the devotion was unreturned, the constancy was not desired. He could only wait, and try to hope; wondering if her tenderness would waken in the end, wondering how he would learn it if it did.

To break the word he had passed to her by pleading again was a thing he could only do in the belief that she would listen to him with happiness. If he misread her mind, and spoke too soon, he not merely committed a wrong—he destroyed the slender link there was between them, for he made it impossible for her to stay on. And yet, how to divine? how, without speaking, to ascertain if she would hear him now with other feelings? What could be gathered from the deep gray eyes, the serious face, the slim-robed figure, as he sometimes stood beside her, guarding his every look and schooling his voice? How could he tell if she cared for him unless he asked her? how could he ask her unless he had reason to suppose she did? The nature of their association seemed to him to impose an insurmountable barrier between them. In freer parlance a ray of the truth might be discernible, and when she had been here a year he determined to gain an opportunity of talking with her alone; to talk with her, if not on matters nearest to him, at least on topics less formal than those to which their conversation was limited in the ward.

Such an opportunity, however, did not lie to his hand. It was difficult to compass without betraying himself, and, in view of the present difficulties, he appeared to have had so many advantages earlier, that he marvelled he could have turned them to so little account. Their acquaintance at the villa during his mother's lifetime appeared to him, by comparison, to have afforded every facility which he was to-day denied, and he frequently recalled the period with passionate regret, thinking he had never appreciated it at its worth, while, indeed, he had only failed to benefit by it. The house was tenanted now by a lady with two children, and Mary often passed it, recalling the period also, albeit with a melancholy vaguer than his. One morning, when she went by, the door was open—the children were coming out—and she had a glimpse of the hall.

They came down the steps, carrying spades and pails, evidently bound for the beach, like herself. The elder of them might have been nine, and, belonging to the familiar house, there was a little sad interest in watching them. She wondered, as they preceded her along the pavement, which of the rooms they slept in, and if the different furniture had altered the aspect of it much. She thought she would like to speak to them when the sands were gained, and then—— You know how, in sauntering along a busy street, one suddenly sees a single face, to the exclusion of all else, so that it seems to smite the eyes, and the perspective narrows to it? Then she saw Seaton Carew! Her heart rose into her throat, her gaze was riveted on him; she could not withdraw it. They were advancing towards each other, and he was looking at her. She saw recognition

flash across his features, and turned her head. The people to right and left swayed a little, and she had passed him. It had taken just fifteen seconds, but she could never remember what she was thinking of when she had seen him. The fifteen seconds had held more emotion for her than the last twelve months.

Her knees trembled. She supposed he must be at the theatre this week, but, when she noticed a playbill displayed outside the music-seller's, was afraid to examine it for fear he might be staring after her. She walked excitedly on. She was filled with a tremulous elation which she cared neither to define nor to acknowledge. She was conscious that it was fortunate she had quitted the hospital a few minutes earlier than usual, or she might have missed him. "Missed" was the word of her reflection. She wondered where he was staying—in which streets the professional lodgings of Westport were. She felt suddenly strange in the town not to know. She had been here three years, and she did not know—how odd! In turning a corner she saw another advertisement of the theatre, this time on a hoarding. The day was Monday, and the paper was still shiny with the bill-sticker's paste. She was screened from observation, and for a moment she paused before it, devouring the cast with a rapid glance. His wife's name did not appear, nor was it their own company; he was fulfilling an engagement in it. She hurried on again. The encounter had acted on her like a strong stimulant. Without knowing why, she was exhilarated. The air was sweeter, life was keener; she was anxious to reach the shore, and find herself in her favourite spot, and give herself up wholly to meditation.

And how little he had changed! Indeed, he seemed scarcely to have changed at all. He looked just as he used to do, though he must have gone through much since the night they parted. Ah, how could she forget that parting? how allow the sting of it to wax fainter? It was pitiful that one could feel things so intensely when they happened, and not be able to keep the intensity alive. The waste of sensation! The puerility of loving or hating, of mourning or rejoicing, so violently in life, when the progress of time, the interposition of irrelevant incident, would smear the passion that engrossed one into an occurrence that one recalled!

She sank on to the bench upon the slope of ragged grass that merged into the shingles and the sand. The sea, vague and unruffled, lay like a sheet of oil, veiled in mist saving for one bright patch on the horizon where it quivered luminously. She bent her eyes upon the sea, and saw the past. His voice struck her soul before she heard his footstep. "Mary!" he said, and she knew that he had followed her.

She did not speak, she did not move. The blood surged into her temples, and left her body cold. She struggled for self-command; for the ability to conceal her agitation; for the power she yearned to gather of blighting him with the scorn she wanted to feel.

"Won't you speak to me?" he said. He came round to her side, and stood there, looking down at her. "Won't you speak?" he repeated—"a word?"

"I have nothing to say to you," she murmured. "I hoped that I might never see you any more."

He waited awkwardly, kicking the soil with the point

of his boot, his gaze wandering from her over the ocean —from the ocean back to her.

"I have often thought about you," he said at last with a jerk—"do you believe that?"

She maintained a silence, and then made as if she would rise.

"Do you believe that I have thought about you?" he demanded quickly. "Answer me!"

"It is nothing to me whether you have thought or not. I dare say you have been ashamed when you remembered your disgrace—what of it?"

"Yes," he said, "I have been ashamed. You were always too good for me; I ought never to have had anything to do with a woman like you."

She had not risen; she was still in the position in which he had surprised her, and she was sensible now of a dull pain at the unexpectedness of his conclusion.

"Why have you followed me?" she said coldly. "For what purpose?"

"'Purpose! Why?' I didn't know you were in the town; I hadn't an idea, and I saw you suddenly. I wanted to speak to you."

"What is it you want to say?"

"Mary!"

"Yes; what do you want to say? I am not your friend; I am not your acquaintance: what have you got to speak to me about?"

"I meant," he stammered—"I wanted to ask you if it was possible, if—if you could ever forgive the way I behaved to you."

"Is that all?" she asked in a hard voice.

"How you have altered! Yes, I don't know that there's anything else."

She did not reply, and he regarded her irresolutely.

"Can you?"

"No," she said. "Why should I forgive you? Because time has gone by? Is that any merit of yours? You treated me brutally, infamously. The most that a woman can do for a man I did for you; the worst that a man can do to a woman you did to me. You meet me accidentally, and expect me to forgive it—you must be a great deal less worldly-wise than you were three years ago."

She turned to him for the first time since he had joined her, and his eyes fell.

"I didn't expect," he said; "I only asked. So you're a nurse again, eh?"

"Yes."

He gave an impatient sigh, the sigh of a man who realizes the discordancy of life, and imperfectly resigns himself to it.

"We're both what we used to be, and we're both older. Well, I'm the worse off of the two, if that's any consolation to you. A woman's always getting opportunities for new beginnings."

She checked the retort that sprang to her lips, eager to glean some knowledge of his affairs, though she could not bring herself to put a question; and after a moment she rejoined indifferently:

"You got the chance you were so anxious for. I understood your marriage was all that was necessary to take you to London."

"I was in London—didn't you hear?" He was

startled into naturalness, the actor's naïve astonishment when he finds his movements are unknown to anyone. "We had a season at the Boudoir, and opened with 'The Cast of the Die.' It was a frost; and then we put on a piece of Sargent's. That might have been worked into a success if there had been money enough left to run it at a loss for a few weeks, but there wasn't. The mistake was not to have opened with it instead. And the capital was too small altogether for a London show; the 'exes' were awful! It would have been better to have been satisfied with management in the provinces if one had known how things were going to turn out. Now it's the provinces under somebody else's management—I suppose you think I have been very rightly served?"

"I don't see that you're any worse off than you used to be," she observed.

"Don't you? You've no interest to see. I'm a lot worse off, for I've a wife and child to keep."

"A child! You have a child?" she said.

"A boy. I don't grumble about that, though; I'm fond of the kid, although I dare say you think I can't be very fond of anyone. But—oh, I don't know why I tell you about it—what do you care?"

They were silent again. The sun, a disc in gray heavens, smeared the vapour with a shaft of pale rose, and on the water this was glorified and enriched, so that the stain on the horizon had turned a deep red. Nearer land, the sea, voluptuously still, and by comparison colourless, had yet some of the translucence of an opal, a thousand elusive subtleties of tint which gleamed between the streaks of darkness thrown upon

its surface from the sky. A thin edge of foam unwound itself dreamily along the shore. A rowing-boat passed blackly across the crimsoned distance, gliding into the obscurity where sky and sea were one. To their right the shadowy form of a fishing-lugger loomed indistinctly through the mist. The languor of the scene had, in contemplation, something emotional in it, a quality that acted on the senses like music from a violin. She was stirred with a mournful pleasure that he was here—a pleasure of which the melancholy was a part. The delight of union stole through her, more exquisite for incompletion:

"It's nothing to you whether I do badly or well," he said gloomily. And the dissonance of the complaint jarred her back to common-sense. "Yet it isn't long ago that we—good Lord! how women can forget; now it's nothing to you!"

"Why should it be anything?" she exclaimed. "How can you dare to remind me of what we used to be? 'Forget!'—yes, I have prayed to forget! To forget I was ever foolish enough to put faith in your honour, and belief in your protestations; to forget I was ever debased enough to like you. I wish I could forget it; it's my punishment to remember. Not because I sinned —bad as it is, that's less—but because I sinned for *you!* If all the world knew what I had done, nobody could despise me for it as I despise myself, or understand how I despise myself. The only person who should is you, for you know what sort of man I did it for."

"I was carried away by a temptation—by ambition,

You make me out as vile as if it had been all deliberately planned. After you had gone——"

"After I had gone you married your manageress. If you had been in love with her, even, I could make excuses for you; but you weren't: you were in love only with yourself. You deserted a woman for money. Your 'temptation' was the meanest, the most contemptible thing a man ever yielded to. 'Ambition'? God knows I never stood between you and that! Your ambition was mine, as much my own as yours, something we halved between us. Has anybody else understood it and encouraged it so well? I longed for your success as fervently as you did; had you succeeded, I should have rejoiced as greatly. When you were disappointed, to whom did you come for consolation? But I could only give you sympathy; and she could give you power. And everything of mine *had* been given; you had had it. That was the main point."

"Call me a villain, and be done—or a 'man'! Will reproaches help either of us now?"

"Don't deceive yourself: there are noble men in the world! I tell you now, because at the time I would say nothing you could regard as an appeal. It only wanted that to complete my indignity—for me to plead to you to change your mind!"

"I wish to Heaven you had done anything rather than go, and that's the truth!"

"*I* don't; I am glad I went—glad, glad, glad! The most awful thing I can imagine is to have remained with you after I knew you for what you are. The most awful thing for you as well: knowing that I knew, the sight of me would have become a curse."

"One mistake," he muttered, "one injustice, and all ıe rest, all that came before, is blotted out; you refuse ɔ remember the sweetest years of both of our lives!"

She gazed slowly round at him with lifted head, ınd during a few seconds each looked in the other's ace, and tried to read the history of the interval in it. Yes, he had altered, after all. The eyes were older. Something had gone from him, something of vivacity, ɔf hope.

"Are you asking me to remember?" she said. "You ıeem to forget for what purpose the injustice was lone."

"Mary, if you knew how wretched I am!"

"Ah," she murmured half sadly, half wonderingly, 'what an egotist you always are! You meet me again —after the way we parted—and you begin by talking bout yourself!"

He made a gesture—dramatic because it expressed ıe feeling he desired to convey so perfectly—and turned side.

"May I question you?" he asked lamely the next ıinute. "Will you answer?"

"What is it that you care to hear?"

"Are you at the hospital?"

"Yes."

"For long? I mean, is it long since you came to Vestport?"

"I have been here nearly all the time."

"And do—how—is it comfortable?"

"Oh," she said, with a movement she was unable ɔ repress, "let us keep to you, if we must talk at all. ou will find the words come more easily."

"Why will you be so cruel?" he exclaimed. "It is you who are unjust now! If I am awkward, it is because you are so curt. You have all the right on your side, and I have the burden of the past on me. You asked me why I spoke to you: if you had been less to me than you were—if I had thought about you less than I have—I shouldn't have spoken. You might understand the position is a very hard one to me; I am wholly at your mercy, and you show me none."

The hands in her lap trembled a little, and after a pause she said in a low voice:

"You expect more from me than is possible; I have suffered too much."

"My trouble has been worse. Ah! don't smile like that: it has been far worse! You have at least had the solace of knowing you have been ill-used; I feel all the time that my bed is of my own making, and that I behaved like a blackguard. Whatever I have to put up with I deserve, I'm quite aware of it; but the knowledge makes it all the beastlier. My life isn't idyllic, Mary; if it weren't for the child—upon my soul! the only moments I get rid of my worries are when I'm playing with the kid, or when I'm drunk."

"Your marriage has not been happy!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"We don't fight; we don't throw the furniture at each other, and have the landlady up, like—what was their name?—the Whittacombes. But we don't find the days too short to say all we've got to tell each other, she and I; and—oh, you can't think what a dreadful thing it is to be in front of a woman all day long that you haven't got anything to say to—it's awful! And

she can't act, and she doesn't get engagements, and it makes her peevish. She might get "shopped" along with me for small parts—in fact, she did once or twice —but that doesn't satisfy her; she wants to go on playing "lead," and now the money's gone she can't. She thinks I mismanaged the damned money, and advised her badly. She hadn't been doing anything for a year until the spring, and then she went out with Laura Henderson to New York. Poor enough terms they are for America, but she'd been grumbling so, I believe she'd go on as an "extra" now rather than nothing, so long as I wasn't playing "lead" to another woman in the same crowd."

She traced an imaginary pattern with her finger on the seat. He was still standing, and suddenly his face lighted up.

"There's Archie!" he said.

"Archie?"

"The boy."

A child of two years, in charge of a servant-girl, was at the gate of one of the cottages behind them.

"You take him about with you?"

"He was left with some people in town; I've just had him down, that's all. We finish on Saturday, and there's the sea: I thought two or three weeks of it would do him good. Will you—may he come over to you?"

He held out his arms, and the child, released from the servant's clasp, toddled smilingly across the grass, a plump little body in pelisse and cape. The gaitered legs covered the ground slowly, and she watched his

child running towards him for what seemed a long time before Carew caught him up.

"This is Archie," he said diffidently; "this is he."

"Oh," she said, in constrained tones, "this is he?"

The man stood him on the bench with a pretence of carelessness that was ill done, and righted his hat quickly, as if afraid the action might savour of the ridiculous. The sight of him in this association had something infinitely strange to her—something that sharpened the sense of separation, and made the past appear intensely old and ended.

"Put him down," she said; "he isn't comfortable."

"Do you think he looks strong?"

"I should say remarkably so. Why?"

"I've wondered—I thought you'd know more about it than I do. Is Archie a good boy?"

"Iss," answered the child. "Mama!"

"Don't talk nonsense—mama's over there!" He pointed to the sea. "He talks very well for his age, as a rule; now he's stupid."

"Oh, let him be," she said, looking at the baby-face with deep eyes; "he's shy, that's all."

"Mama!" repeated the mite insistently, and laid a hand on her long cloak.

"The thumb is wrong," she murmured after a pause in which the man and woman were both embarrassed; "see, it isn't in!"

She drew the tiny glove off, and put it on once more, taking the fragile fingers in her own, and parting with them slowly. A feeling complex and wonderful crept into her heart at the voice of Tony's child, a feeling of half-reluctant tenderness, coupled with an

aching jealousy of the womanhood that had borne him one.

They made a group to which any glance would have reverted—a trio on whose connection any educated passer-by would have speculated without guessing it: the old-young man, who was obviously the father; the baby; and the thoughtful woman, whose dress proclaimed her to be a nurse. The dress, indeed, which was perhaps the group's most conspicuous feature, was not without its influence on Carew. It reminded him of the days of his and her first acquaintance, since which they had been together, and separated, and drifted into different channels. Having essayed matrimony as a means to an end, and proved it a *cul-de-sac,* he blamed the woman with whom he had blundered very ardently, and would have been gratified to dilate on his mistake to the other one, who was more than ever attractive because she no longer belonged to him. The length of veil which fell below her waist had, in his fancy, a cloistral suggestion which imparted to his allusions to their intimacy an additional fascination; and Archie's presence had seldom occupied his attention so little. Yet he was fonder of this offshoot of himself than he had been of her even in the period which the dress recalled, and it was because she dimly understood the fact that the child touched her so nearly. Like almost every man in whom the cravings of ambition have survived the hope of their fulfilment, he dwelt a great deal on the future of his son; longed to see his boy achieve the success which he had come to realize he would never attain himself, and lost in the interest of fatherhood some of the poignancy of failure. The desire

to talk to her of these and many other things was strong in him, but she roused herself from reverie and said good-bye, as if on sudden impulse, just as he was meaning to speak.

"I shall see you again?"

"I think not."

Then he would have asked if they parted in peace, but her leave-taking was too abrupt even for him to formulate the inquiry.

CHAPTER XIII.

It surprised him, and left him vaguely disappointed. To break off their interview thus sharply seemed to him motiveless and odd. He could suggest no explanation for it, and his gaze followed her receding figure with speculative regret. When she was out of sight he picked the child up, and, carrying him into the cottage parlour, sat down beside the open window, smoking and thinking of her.

It was a small room, poorly furnished, and, fretted by its limitations, Archie became speedily fractious. A slipshod landlady pottered around, setting forth the crockery for dinner, while the little servant, despatched with the boy from town, mashed his dinner into an unappetizing compound on a plate. From time to time she turned to soothe him with some of the loud-voiced facetiæ peculiar to the little servant species in its dealings with fretful childhood, and at these moments Carew suspended his meditations on his quondam mistress to wish for the presence of his wife. It was only the second day of his son's visit to him, and his unfamiliarity with the arrangement was not without its effect upon his nerves.

Dissatisfied by temperament, his capacity for enjoying the past was proportionately keen, and, reflectively consuming a chop in full view of the unappe-

tizing compound and infancy's vagaries with a spoon, he proceeded to re-live it, discerning in the process a thousand charms to which the reality had seen him blind.

Nor was he able to shake off the influence of the encounter when dinner was done. Fancifully, while the child scrambled in a corner with some toys, he installed Mary in the room; imagining his condition if he had married her, and moodily watching his clouds of smoke as they sailed across the dirty dishes. "Damn it!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet. Such titillation of the mind was productive of the desire for a further meeting, and, but for the conviction that the endeavours would be futile, he would have gone at once into the streets.

That he would see her again before he left the place he was determined, but he failed to do so both on the morrow and the next day, albeit he extended his promenade beyond its usual limits. He did not in these excursions fail to remark that a town sufficiently large to divide one hopelessly from the face one seeks, can yet be so small that the same strangers' countenances are recurrent at nearly every turn. A coloured gentleman he anathematized especially for his iteration.

Though he doubted the possibility of the thing, he could not rid himself of the idea that she would be at the theatre some evening, impelled by the temptation to look upon him without his knowledge; and he played his best now on the chance she might be there. As often as was practicable, he scanned the house during the progress of the piece, and between the acts inspected it through the peep-hole in the curtain.

Noticing his observations one night, a pretty girl in the "wings" asked jocularly if "*she* had promised to wait outside for him."

"No, Kitty, my darling, she hasn't; she won't have anything to do with me!" he answered, and would have liked to stop and flirt with her. His brain was hot in the instant, and one woman or another just then——

If Mary had indeed been waiting, he could have talked to her as sentimentally as before. He would have felt as much sentiment too, such passing attention as that diminishing his stock of it in no degree, but rather heightening it, any compunction for the indulgence experienced subsequently being assuaged by a general condemnation of masculine nature.

The pretty girl had no part in the play. She was the daughter of a good-looking woman who filled the dual capacity of 'chambermaid' and wardrobe-mistress. Albeit she had only just left boarding-school, however, it was a foregone conclusion that, like her mother, she would be connected with the lower branches of the profession before very long. Already she had acquired very perfectly, in private, the "burlesque-lady" tone of address, and was not unacquainted with the interiors of certain provincial bars, where her parent was addicted to taking what she termed her "nightcap" after the performance.

Carew discovered them both, among a group of the male members of the company, in the little back-parlour of an adjacent public-house an hour later. Kitty, innocent enough as yet to find "darling" a novelty, welcomed his advent with a flash of her eyes; but to this

overture he gave no response, and, sipping his whisky, abandoned himself to reverie until the others commented on his abstraction. He replied morosely, and, emptying his glass at a gulp, called for it to be refilled. It was not unusual for him now to drink to excess—he was accustomed to excuse the weakness by compassionating himself upon his dreary life—and to-night he lay back on the settee imbibing whisky, until his voice was heard above the rest at last, in the loquacity which preludes intoxication.

They remained at the table long after the hour for closing; the landlady, who was a friend of Kitty's mamma, enjoining them to quietude, and appearances being maintained without their removal. She was not averse to joining the party herself when the lights in the window had been extinguished, nor did Kitty decline a glass of wine either when pressed by Carew to be sociable.

"Because you're growing up," he said with a foolish laugh—"'getting a big girl now'!"

She swept him a mock obeisance in the centre of the floor, shaking back the hair that still hung loose about her shoulders.

"Sherry," she said, "if mother says her 'popsy' may! Because I'm 'getting a big girl now,' mother!"

The bar was in darkness, and this necessitated investigation with a box of matches. When the bottle was produced, it proved to be empty, the girl's pantomime of despair being received with loud guffaws. Everybody had drunk more than was advisable, and the proprietress again attempted to restrain the hilarity by feeble allusions to her licence.

"The sherry's in the cupboard down the passage!" she exclaimed; "won't you have something else instead? Now, do make less noise, there's good boys; you'll get me into trouble!"

"I'll go and get it," said Kitty, breaking into a momentary step-dance, with uplifted arms. "Trust me with the key?"

"And *I'll* go and see she doesn't rob you," cried Carew. "Come along, Kit!"

"Not you," said her mother; "she'll do best alone!" But the remonstrance was unheeded, and, as the girl ran out into the passage, he followed, till, as they reached the cupboard and stood fumbling at the lock, he caught her round the waist and kissed her.

They came back with the bottle together, in the girl's bearing an assertion of complacent womanhood evoked by the indignity. Carew applied himself to the liquor with renewed diligence, and by the time the gathering dispersed circumspectly through the private door, his eyes were glazed.

The sleeping town stretched before his uncertain footsteps blanched in moonlight as he bade the others a thick "good-night," and, with inebriety's lowered brows and fixity of stare, took his way towards home. It was a mile and more distant, and, muddled by the potations, he struck into the wrong road, pursuing and branching from it impetuously, until Westport wound itself around him in all the confusion of a maze. Once he paused beside a doorway, fancying he heard the tread of an approaching pedestrian who might direct him; but the sound, if sound there had been, became no clearer, and, his head grown heavier with the air,

he wandered on again, ultimately with no effort to divine his situation. The sun was rising when, partially sobered, he passed through the cottage-gate at length. The sea lapped gently on the sand under a flushing sky, but in the bedroom a candle burned still, and it was in the flare of this that the little servant confronted him with a frightened face.

"Master Archie, sir!" she faltered; "I've been up with him all night—he's ill!"

"Ill?" He stood stupidly on the threshold, looking, at her. "What do you mean by ill? what is it?"

"I don't know, sir; I don't know what I ought to do; I think he ought to have a doctor."

He pushed past her, with a muttered ejaculation, to where the child lay whimpering and tossing on the bed.

"What's the matter, Archie? What is it, little chap?"

"It's his neck he complains of," she murmured; "you can see it's all swollen. He can't eat anything."

The father passed his fingers round the tiny throat, gazing about him in dismay. Affection for a child never works a transformation in a man's character, though love for a woman may do it in exceptional cases; but the firmest devotion he could know Carew had given to his son, and now a dread of losing him, a sudden terror of his own incompetence, gripped his heart.

"Fetch someone," he stammered; "go, and bring a doctor back with you. Good Lord! why did I have him down?"

He sank on to the edge of the mattress, pressing his

hand across his brow as if to smooth away the fumes of liquor from his understanding. A basin of water was on the washstand, and he rose and plunged his head into its depths. While he waited the stir of awakening life began to mingle with the quietness. Through the window came the clatter of feet in the neighbouring yard, the rattle of a pail upon stone. He contemplated the languid features, conscience-stricken by his own condition, the inappropriateness of which appeared to intensify the gravity of the child's, and strove to allay his anxiety by repeated questions, to which he obtained peevish and unsatisfactory replies.

It was upwards of two hours before the girl returned. She was accompanied by a practitioner in whose attire the signs of a hasty toilette were plainly visible. Carew watched his examination eagerly, vaguely relieved by the professional calm.

"Is it serious?" he demanded.

"It looks like diphtheria, but it's early yet to say. He has a splendid constitution; that's half the battle. Mother a good physique? So I should have thought! Are you a resident in the town, sir?"

"I'm an actor; I'm in an engagement here; my wife's abroad. Why do you ask?"

The doctor included the artist and the room in an abstracted glance.

"The little one had better be removed," he said, buttoning his coat; "there's danger of infection with diphtheria: lodgings won't do. Take him to the hospital, and have him properly looked after. It'll be best for him in every way."

"I am much obliged for your advice," Carew answered

hesitatingly. "I shall be here myself for another week at least," he added, in allusion to the fee. "Is it safe to move him, do you think?"

"Oh yes, no need to fear that. Wrap him up, and take him away in a fly this morning. The sooner the better. . . . Not at all, my dear sir. Good-day to you."

He departed blithely, with an appetite for breakfast, and Carew went slowly back to the bed where Archie remained crying at the stranger's touch.

"Archie will have a nice drive," he said, modulating his voice to a tone of dreary encouragement—"a nice drive in a carriage with papa."

"I'se tired," said the child, "I'se sleepy."

"A nice drive out in the sunshine, and see the sea." He moistened his lips with his drink-furred tongue. "Nurse will put on your clothes."

"I'se seen the sea, I don't want!"

And Carew's own distaste to the proposed arrangement was increased by the sight of the efforts to resist. It was not in the first few minutes that this abrupt presentment of the hospital to the man's mind recalled Mary's connection with it, and when the recollection flashed back to him his spirits lightened. If the boy was really to be laid up, away from his mother's relatives in London, he felt it could hardly be under happier circumstances than to be ill where—— The reflection faded to a question-point. *Would* she be of use? Could he expect or dare to ask for tenderness from Mary Brettan—and to the other woman's child? He doubted it.

In the revulsion of feeling that followed that leaping hope, he almost determined to withhold the request.

Many people's children were safe in a hospital; why not his? He would pay for everything. And then he sickened at the thought of the frailty of the life he was told to leave to the tendance of strange hands—the little form that seemed to him, in its sickness, to have become smaller still, and more fragile.

The difference between the careless and the fond is often but a difference of duration, and in Carew's impulsive emotion of the present there was the same sincerity that would have been experienced by the best of men. As he lay back in the jolting vehicle with Archie in his arms, he debated again and again a plea to Mary to be kind to him, daunted by the outrage of such an appeal, and wrestling with the shame of it for the sake of the benefit it would give his boy. Without knowing what she could do, he was sensible that her interest would be valuable. He clung passionately to the idea of quitting the hospital with the knowledge that it contained a friend, an individual who would spare to the little fellow something more than the patient's equitable and purchased due.

The cab halted with a jerk, and still revolving the point he went into the empty waiting-room. It was a gaunt, narrow apartment on the ground-floor, with an expanse of glass, like the window of a shop, overlooking the street. He sat Archie in a corner of one of the forms ranged against the walls, and, pending the appearance of the house-surgeon, played nervously with the cover of an old volume of an illustrated paper on the table. The minutes of delay lagged drearily. He recollected on a sudden that it could happen the symptoms might be pronounced quite trifling, a consideration

that occurred to him for the first time, but which vanished, almost as it came, under the influence of the surroundings. The bare melancholy of the walls chilled him anew, and the suggestion of poverty about the place added to his misgivings. He thought he would resolve to speak to her; if she refused he would have done no harm. And she would not refuse, she was so good. Yes, she had always been a good woman. He remembered——

The handle of the door turned abruptly, and he rose in the presence of Kincaid. The eyes of the two men met for an instant in a questioning glance.

"Your child?" said Kincaid, advancing.

Carew made assent.

"It is his neck," he explained. "I was advised to bring him here, because I am only in lodgings in the town. I should wish him——"

"Let me see!" An interval of suspense ensued. Carew resumed his seat, his gaze dwelling upon the doctor's movements, every detail of professional procedure twanging on his nerves. A nurse was called in to take the temperature. He watched her breathlessly, and smiled feebly at the babe across her arm. "Diphtheritic throat! We'll put him to bed at once. Take him into a special ward, nurse."

"I should like——" said Carew huskily. "One of the nurses here is known to me—might I be allowed to see her?"

"Yes, certainly; which one?"

"Her name is Brettan—Mary Brettan." He stooped to caress the tearful face as it was carried forth, and

the other's indication of surprise escaped him. "If she is disengaged——"

Kincaid spoke to the retiring woman.

"See if Nurse Brettan can come down, please," he said. "Say she is wanted in the waiting-room."

A brief pause followed the withdrawal. The closing of the door left them alone, and both remained standing silently. The father's imagination pursued the figures that had disappeared; Kincaid's was busy with the fact of the man being an acquaintance of Mary's—the only acquaintance who had crossed his path. Surprise suggested his opening remark.

"You are a visitor in the town, you say?" he observed. "Your little son's sickness has come at an unfortunate time for you."

"It has—yes, very. I am playing at the theatre, and my apartments are none too good."

He mentioned the address, and the doctor made some formal inquiries. Carew asked how often he could be permitted to see the boy, and when this was arranged, silence fell again.

It was interrupted in a few seconds. The sound of a footstep on the stairs was caught by them simultaneously. Simultaneously both men looked round in the direction whence it came. The footstep was succeeded by the faint rustle of a skirt, and Nurse Brettan moved across the threshold of the room. She started visibly, controlling herself, and acknowledging Carew's greeting by a slight bow.

Kincaid in a manner presented him to her—courteously, constrainedly.

"This gentleman has been waiting to see you," said he. "I will wish you good-morning, sir."

The woman went over to the window, and stood there without speaking. In the print and linen costume of the house she recalled to Carew with increased force the days of their earliest meeting.

"Archie has got diphtheria," he said; "he's just been taken upstairs."

"I am sorry!" she rejoined. "Why have you asked for me?"

"They said I could not keep him at home—that he must be brought to the hospital. Mary, you will do what you can for him?"

She raised her head calmly.

"He is sure of careful nursing," she answered; "none of the patients are neglected."

"I know—I know all that. I thought you——"

"I am not in the children's ward," she said; "there is nothing in my power."

He confronted her dumbly. Indifference by itself his agitation would have found vent in combating, but the conclusiveness of the reply left him nothing to urge.

"I must be satisfied without you, then," he said at last. "I thought of you directly."

"He will have every attention; you need not doubt that."

"Such a little chap—among strangers!"

"We have very young children in the wards."

"And perhaps to be dangerously ill!"

"You should try to hope for the best."

"Ah, you speak like the hospital nurse to me!" he cried; "I remembered the woman!"

"I speak to you like what I am!" she returned coldly; "I *am* one of the nurses. Myself, I have no remembrances."

"You could remember this week when we met again. And once you would not have found it so impossible to spare a minute's kindness to my boy!"

She moved towards the door, paler, but self-contained.

"I must leave you now," she said; "I am not able to remain away very long."

"You choose to forget only when something is asked of you."

"I have told you," she said, turning, "that it is out of my power to do anything."

"And you are glad you can truthfully say it."

"Perhaps. No reminder of my old disgrace is pleasant to me."

"Your reformation is a very complete one," he answered bitterly; "the woman I used to know would have been unable to retaliate upon a helpless child."

The sting of the retort roused her to refutation. Her hand, which had been extended towards the handle, dropped to her side; she faced him swiftly.

"You find me what you made of me!" she said with white lips. "I neither retaliate nor pity; what is your wife's child to me, that you ask my care of it? If I am hard, it was you who taught me hardness before ever he was born!"

"It is *my* child I asked your care for; and I brought myself to ask it because he's my dearest thing on

earth. I thank God to learn he won't be in your charge!"

She shivered—he saw the shiver in her features—and for a moment looked at him intently. Then her eyelids drooped, and she left him without a word.

She went out into the corridor—her hand was pressed against her breast—but the routine the interview had broken was not immediately resumed. She made her way into the children's wing, moving with nothing of indecision in her manner, but like one who proceeds to fulfil a settled purpose. The beds, side by side in two rows, left a passage down the middle of the floor, and through this she walked, scanning the avenue of faces, until she reached the nurses' table.

As it chanced, it was to the one Kincaid had summoned that she addressed herself:

"There's a boy just been brought in with diphtheria, Sophie; do you know where he is?"

"Yes, I'm going back to him in a minute. He's in a special ward."

"Let me see him!"

"Have you got permission?"

"No."

Nurse Gay hesitated.

"I shall get into trouble," she said. "Why don't you ask for it?"

"I don't want to wait; I want to see him now!"

"I've been in hot water once this week already——"

"Sophie, I know the mite, and—and his people. I *must* go in to him!"

The girl glanced at her sharply, startled by something in her voice.

"Oh, if it comes to that," she said, "it's only a 'wigging'—go!" And she told her whereabouts he was.

He lay, when Mary entered, alone in the simple room—a diminutive patient for whom the narrow cot seemed large. The nurse had been showing him a picture-book; and this yawned loosely on the quilt, where it had slid, during her absence, from the languid hold. At the sound of Mary's approach he turned, as if in hope the other had returned, but, meeting with a countenance he did not recognise, sighed weakly, a doubtful gaze appraising her intentions.

At first she did not speak. She stooped over the pillow, smoothing and re-smoothing it mechanically, a hand trembling closer to the warmth of the disordered curls. Her own gaze deepened and hung upon him; her lips parted. Her hands crept timidly nearer, and rested on the little head entirely, till the quiver of its pulses stirred under her touch. Gradually her bosom drooped, until her mouth was yielding kisses on his cheek. She yearned over him through wet lashes, with the wondering smile always on her face.

"Archie," she murmured; "Archie, baby-boy, is it 'comfy' for you? Won't you see the pictures—all the pretty people in the book?"

"Show more pictures," he said wearily, "others, to me!"

"You shall have others this afternoon, dear," she answered; "this afternoon, when I go out. Let me show you these now! See, there's a little boy in bed, like you. Such a nice little boy; his name was 'Archie,'

too, and one day papa took him to a big house, where papa had friends, and——"

"Papa! I *want* papa!"

"Oh, my darling," she said, "papa is coming! He will come very, very soon. The other little boy wanted papa just as you do, and he wasn't happy at first at all. But in the big house—the same as this—everybody was so kind, and glad to have Archie, that presently he was quite pleased to stop. It was so nice directly; it was better than at home. They gave him toys, and lots and lots of picture-books; and on the table there were oranges and puddings—it was beautiful!"

She reviewed, meanwhile, the father's pleading eyes, red with the marks of whisky, which she commiserated as the evidence of a watchful night.

It was impossible to remain, she was needed elsewhere; and when Kincaid made the matutinal round she was on duty. But she ascertained the developments throughout the day almost as they came, and she knew by twilight that the child was grievously unwell. She did not marvel at her interest. It engrossed her to the exclusion of astonishment. If she was surprised at all, it was that Carew could have believed in her neutrality, the assumption of which sustained her miserably in recollection, even while she joyed to reflect that his first impulse had been to put faith in her good heart. She did not, as she might have done, submit the passion of sympathy to analysis, ashamed of the cause from which it sprang. When she had gazed during the intervening years at the faded photograph kept since the farewell, she had reproached herself and wept. Now it all seemed

natural. She sought neither to reason nor to euphemize. The feeling was spontaneous, and she went with it. She called it by no wrong word, because she called it nothing. She was borne as it carried her, blindly and unresistingly, without pausing to name it or to define its source. It seemed quite natural. She inquired about Archie when she had risen next morning, contriving a little later another flying visit to the room; but he was now too ill to notice her, and she quitted him unrelieved by the inspection.

Carew came again that afternoon; she learnt it while he still was there, and gathered—affecting indifferent concern—something of his wretchedness. She heard how he besieged the nurse with questions: "whether she had seen so bad a case before—well, often before? Were those who recovered so young as this one? Was there nothing else that could be tried?" She listened, her head bowed, imagining the scene she could not enter; deploring, remembering, re-living—praying for "Tony's son."

Not, however, until after the man had gone was everything that had occurred related to her. She was sitting at the extremity of the ward, sewing, shortly to be free for the night. It was the hour when the quietude of hospital atmosphere begins to deepen into the perceptible hush which preludes the extinction of the patients' lights. The tea-trays had long since been removed from the bedsides. Through the apertures of curtain a few of the occupants, loath to waive the privilege while they held it, were to be seen immersed in books and magazines; but others had succumbed to sleep already, and even the most convalescent, the late-

birds of the ward who dissipated in wheel-chairs to the admiration of the rest, had suspended their excursions till the morrow. The Major—nicknamed the "Watchman"—who executed his peregrinations in a dressing-gown, had stopped before the last opening, and wished the last of the wakeful ones "a comfortable night, sir." The chess champion had concluded his final conquest on a recumbent adversary's quilt. Where breakfast comes at six o'clock, grown men resume some of the habits of their infancy, and the day that begins so early closes soon. It was very peaceful, very still, and she was sitting in the lamp-rays, sewing.

She looked round as the matron joined her. Her interest in the case was known, and the two commenced to talk in subdued voices.

"How is he?"

"He's been dreadfully bad! The worst of it took place before the father left: Dr. Kincaid had to come up."

"What?—tell me!"

"He had to perform tracheotomy. The father was there all the time; Dr. Kincaid explained to him what was going to be done, and he wouldn't go. The child was blue in the face, and there wasn't any stopping to argue! When the cut was made in the throat, and the tube put in, I never saw a man turn colour so! I was standing just by him, and he caught hold of my arm. 'My God,' he said, 'will he breathe easier through that? Won't it hurt him?" I told him it was the only way of enabling the mite to fetch his breath at all, but he scarcely seemed to hear me. The tears were running down his face, and when the boy burst into a fit of

coughing—you know the sort of coughing that follows——"

"Yes, yes, what then?"

"He thought he was going to die. He broke down altogether, and the doctor ordered him out of the room. 'If you're fond of your son, keep quiet here, sir,' he said, 'or go and compose yourself outside!" I think he was sorry he'd spoken so sternly afterwards, though he was quite right, for——"

"Oh," murmured Mary, "this is ghastly!"

The canvas opposite had been adorned with the presentation "plate" of a "Summer Number," and she sat staring at it fixedly, cold and damp.

"I went out after him," pursued the other, "and comforted him as much as I could. He took both my hands and patted them like a girl. 'You're a good woman,' he said—'a good woman. I'd no business to have stopped; I haven't the nerves for it! But I'm glad I was there: whatever happens, I shall always think it was right I was there, don't you?' I said he must try to believe that only the best was going to happen now; though whether I was right to say it, God knows! When it comes to tracheotomy in diphtheria, the child's chance—— Still, this one is as fine a little fellow as ever I saw; he's the strength of many a pair we get here. And the man was in such a state of mind I could have cried for him! When he had to leave—he had to hurry off to the theatre to act—he was just as white as a sheet. How he'll get through I can't imagine! He's coming back to-night directly he finishes; he's to see *me,* if he doesn't see the child."

"I must go!" exclaimed Mary; "I must go to the ward!" She rose, pressing her hands together convulsively. "I can go in to him, can't I? It is Nurse Mainwaring's time to relieve me — why isn't she here?"

The matron calmed her considerately.

"Hush! you can go to him as soon as she comes," she said; "don't 'take on,' or I shall be sorry I told you. Nurse Bradley has complained of feeling ill; I expect she is delayed by that."

Mary raised a faint smile, deprecating her vehemence.

"I am very fond of the boy," she answered, with apology in her tones; "I thank you for thinking of telling me very much."

The looked-for woman now appeared.

"Nurse Bradley is unable to get up, madam," she announced.

"Nonsense! what is it?"

"A sick-headache; she can't see out of her eyes."

There was the consternation that always falls in a hospital when one of the staff is indisposed—the interregnum of dismay, during which the rest gaze blankly in their neighbour's faces.

"Then we are short-handed to-night. You relieve here, Nurse Mainwaring?"

"Yes, madam."

"And Nurse Gay—who should relieve her?"

"Nurse Bradley."

"*I* will relieve her," declared Mary; "I ask for nothing better."

"You need your night's rest as much as most. And

there's no napping with 'trachy'—it means a continual watch."

"I shall not nap; I shall not wish to. Somebody must lose her night's rest—why not I?"

"I think we can manage without you."

"It will be a favour to me. I am grateful for the opportunity.

"Well, then, you shall halve it with someone. You can take the first half, and——"

"No," she urged, "that is hard on the other, and no grace to me. Give it me all."

The matron solved the dilemma:

"Nurse Brettan relieves Nurse Gay!"

In the room the boy lay motionless, as if already dead. From the mouth breath no longer passed, and only by a hand placed before the opening of the tube inserted in the childish throat could it be detected by sensation that he now breathed at all. As Mary took her place by his side the force of professional training displayed itself in the most practical form. She had begged for the extra duty with almost feverish excitement; she entered upon it collected and self-controlled. A stranger would have said: "A conscientious woman, but experience has blunted her sensibilities."

On the table were some feathers, with one of which she would from time to time throughout the night be required to keep the tube free from obstruction. Indulgence, however brief, to an attack of drowsiness was under the circumstances impossible. To devote unwavering attention to the state of the passage through which air was admitted to the lungs was not merely important, the necessity was vital. A rigid, a never-

ceasing vigilance was required. It was to this the nurse, already worn by the usual duties of the day, had pledged herself in default of the absentee.

At half-past nine she had cleansed the tube twice. At ten Kincaid appeared. She rose as he came in.

"I am relieving Nurse Gay," she said; "Nurse Bradley is indisposed."

He went to the cot and ascertained that all was well.

"It will be very trying for you; was there no one to divide the work?"

"I wanted to do it all myself."

"Ah yes, I understand; you know the father."

It was the first reference to the other's request for her that he had made, and she was sensible of some inquiry in his tone. She bowed mutely; and, in the only occasion during which he had been alone with her since her appointment, they stood together looking at Carew's son.

She had no wish to speak. On him who could have said much the situation imposed restraint, though to be with her thus had yet its fascination to him: a vague charm not to be uttered, not to be dwelt on, but a sentiment of confidential intercourse, due in part to the prevailing silence of the house, such as he had not felt with her before.

While they looked, the boy gave a quick gasp. The tube had become clogged.

Mary started spasmodically, throwing out her arm for the feather; but Kincaid had been before her, favoured by his position.

"All right!" he said; "I will free it."

He leant over the pillow, feather in hand. She watched him steadfastly, her eyes widening in terror, for she saw his endeavours were futile, and he could not free it.

The waxen placidity of the upturned face vanished as she watched. Labouring for breath, it regained the signs of life to struggle with the gripe of death—distorted in an instant, and distorted frightfully. An ordinary woman would have wept aloud. The nurse, to all intents and purposes, preserved her calmness still.

It was Kincaid who gave the first signal of despondence.

"The thing is blocked!" he exclaimed; "I cannot clear it!"

His voice had the repressed despair of a surgeon who is also an enthusiast confronted by a higher and opposing force. Under the test of his defeat her composure broke down. Amidst a danger in which her interest was vivid and personal she—as the father had done before her—became agitated and unstrung.

"You must!" she answered. "Doctor, for God's sake!"

He was still striving, but with scant success.

"I am doing my utmost," he said; "it seems no good!"

"You must save this life!" she repeated; "you will?"

"I have said I can do no more."

"You will—you shall!" she persisted wildly. The very passion of motherhood suffused her features. "Doctor, it is *his* child!"

He looked at her; he looked at her once even then.

Their eyes met in a flash across the cot; there was no room for more. The gasps of the dying baby became abruptly horrible to witness. The eyeballs rolled hideously, seeming as if they would spring from their sockets. The tiny chest heaved and fell in frequent and agonizing efforts to gain air, while in its convulsive battle against suffocation the frail body almost lifted itself from the mattress.

"Go away!" said the man huskily; "there is nothing you can do!"

She refused to stir. She appealed to him with desperate gaze.

"Help him!" she stammered.

"There is no way!"

"Do you, the doctor, tell me there is no way?"

"I tell you, none!"

"But *I* know there *is* a way!" she cried resolutely. "I can suck that tube!"

"Mary! My God! it might kill you!"

She flung herself forward, but the conflict ceased as he withheld her. A small quantity of the mucus had been dislodged by the paroxysm it had produced. Nature had done—imperfectly, but still done—what science had failed to effect: the child breathed again.

The outbreak was followed by complete exhaustion, and once more it seemed that life was already extinct. Kincaid assured himself it still lingered, and turned to her gravely.

"You were about to do a wicked and a foolish thing. After what it has gone through, nothing under heaven can save the child; you ought to know it. At

best you could only hope to prolong his life for two or three hours."

She was crying great tears. They fell on the heart of the man who loved her, and burnt there with the cause.

"'Only!'" she said brokenly; "do you think that is nothing to me? An hour longer, and the father will be here—to find him living or dead! Do you suppose I can't imagine—do you suppose I don't feel—what *he* feels there on the stage while he counts each moment for the blessing of release? In an hour the curtain will have fallen, and he will have rushed here with a prayer to be in time. If it were revealed that I should do nothing but prolong the life by the sacrifice of mine, I would sacrifice it! Gladly, proudly—yes, proudly—as God hears! You could never have prevented me; nothing should prevent me! I would risk my life ten times rather than he should arrive too late!"

"This," murmured her lover drearily, "is the return you would make for his sin!"

"No," she said; "it is the atonement I would offer for mine!"

He stood dumbly at the head of the cot; the woman trembled at the foot. But they saw the change next minute simultaneously. For the second and last time the passage had become hopelessly clogged. She gave a hoarse cry, and darted to the vacant side. He could not hinder her. He spoke.

"Stop! Nurse Brettan, I order you to leave the ward!"

The voice rang true, and an instant she wa
but it was the veriest instant. The woman ha
quished the nurse, and the woman was the st
now. A glance sped at him of mingled suppl
and defiance, and, casting herself on the bed, s
her lips to the tube!

CHAPTER XIV.

It was the work of a moment. Almost as he started forward to restrain her, she had raised herself, and, burying her face in a handkerchief, leant, shaking, against the wall.

Kincaid gazed at her, white and stern, and a tense silence ensued, broken by her:

"You can have me dismissed," she said; "he will see his child!"

He answered nothing. The cruelty of the speech that ignored and perverted everything outside the interests of the man by whom she had been wronged seemed the last blow his pain could have to bear. A sense of the injustice and inequality of life's distribution overwhelmed him. Viewed in the light of her defeated enemy, he felt as broken, as far from dignity or power, as if the imputation had been just.

She resumed her seat, and, lingering so long as duty still demanded, he at length ejected some required remark. She replied constrainedly; the intervention of the pause was demonstrated by their tones, which sounded flat and dull. He was thankful when he could retire, nor was his withdrawal less welcome to the woman, to whose reactionary weakness the removal of

supervision came as balm. He went heavily from her, and she drew her chair yet closer to the bedside; the subsiding exaltation of her mood echoed from her relief at his departure.

Carew would see his boy; she had no other settled thought, save an averse remembrance that he must perforce see her as well. The reflection that he would hear of her share in the matter gladdened her scarcely at all; indeed, when she contemplated his enlightenment, she was bashful and perturbed. He would learn that his original faith in her had been justified, and he would be sorry—piteously sorry—for all the hard words that he had used. But by herself there was little to be gained: what she had done had been for him. She found it even a humiliation to think that her jeopardizing her life would be known to him—a humiliation which his gratitude would do nothing to decrease. She consulted the watch she had pawned for the rent of her garret after his renunciation of her, and determined the length of time before he could arrive.

The stress of the last few minutes could not be suffered to beget any abatement of wariness. But by degrees, as the reverberation of the outburst faded, she felt more tranquil than she had done since the matron joined her earlier in the evening; and she continued the vigil with undiminished care. Archie would die—she bewailed the edict, foreseeing the shock of the death upon another—but now the father would be present at least. The closing moments would not pass while he was simulating misery or mirth upon a stage. Horror of the averted fate, more dreadful to a woman's mind even

than to the father's own, made this brief protraction appear an almost priceless boon.

It was possible for him to be here already; scarcely likely, perhaps, so soon as this, but possible, supposing that the piece "played quick," and a cab had been ordered to await him at the door. She listened for the roll of wheels in the distance, but the quietude was undisturbed. Archie was lying as calmly as when she had entered. Assuming no further impediments occurred to exhaust the remaining strength more speedily, it seemed safe to infer he might last two hours.

Her misgivings anent her risk were slight. The danger she had run might prove fatal; contrariwise, it need do nothing of the kind. Similar deeds had been performed with impunity—she had heard of one, at any rate, and she recalled it. In her own case a serious result looked exceedingly unlikely, because in health catastrophes to other people always appear more probable than to one's self, and she regarded the benefit acquired by her temerity as being cheaply bought. None, however, knew better than she how much completive attention was called for, what alertness of eye and hand was essential when the act was done; and, sitting there, her gaze was fastened on the boy as if she sought to hearken to every flutter of his pulse.

Now a cab did approach, and she caught her breath as it rattled near. It stopped, she fancied, before the hospital gate. Still with the stare riveted on the unconscious child, she strained her ears for the confirmatory tread. The seconds ticked away, swelling to minutes,

and no footstep fell. The hope had been illusive, for presently the conveyance was heard again, in driving off. She began to grow impatient and distressed. Allowing a margin for a too sanguine calculation, it was time the man was here! Once admitting the delay to be unaccountable, no conjecture could be formed as to its extent. Her fingers were laced and unlaced nervously in her lap. She conceived the rumble of cab-wheels in the soughing of the wind, intent and discomfited alternately. The faint slamming of a cottage-door startled her to expectation. In the intensity of the hush, that sank with every subsidence of sound, she could feel the throbbing of her heart.

Out in the town a clock struck twelve, and suspense verged upon despair. Her eyes now hung upon the boy, haggard with desperation; she leant over him in an absorption of solicitude, ready to contest the advent of the end inch by inch. So far no change was shown. Carew might find him living even yet! A prayer that it should be so rose from her, unformulated and imploring. Racked with anticipation and despondence, tortured by the fear that what she had done might, after all, be labour thrown away, she strove to devise some theory of explanation and encouragement; the confinement of her position, which debarred her excitement from the vent of unrestricted action, becoming at last an almost physical pain.

The clock struck again—one! It swept suddenly across her that the matron had seemed doubtful of letting Carew proceed to the ward on his return, and that

he might have come and gone. She had been reaching forward, and her arm remained extended aimlessly. A coldness like a wave of ice-water spread through her body, and the pliability of the face left it, so that it stiffened and was undesirable to see. If during ten seconds she thought of anything but her neglect to ensure his admission, she thought she felt the blood dripping away in little pin-pricks from her cheeks. The solution banished the shred of hope to which she had yet clung, and, thwarted by her own oversight, frustration paralyzed the woman. Her enterprise now assumed an aspect of grievous hazard, enhanced by its futility. She lifted herself faint at soul. Her ministrations were instinctive, mechanical. She resumed the offices, she was assiduous and watchful, but she appeared to herself prompted by the volition of another, operated by some outside influence, with her mind half numbed.

In the midst of this a new hope thrilled her abruptly. She heard the stroke of three, and the boy was living still. The leaping thought she was afraid to welcome shook her back to ardour. She tried to put it aside; she said it was vain, chimerical. She tried to believe it had been a transient fancy without power to support her. But it had sent the colour rushing to her neck and brow, and her hands were hot. She sat strained with the intensity of what she trembled to acknowledge. Each minute that might bring the end, and yet withheld it, saw her regard more fixed. Each minute meant encouragement that gripped her with its force. Time crept, debilitated by the fever of suspense. Between eternities the distant clock rang forth the quarters,

hollow and reverberant, across the sleeping town, and at every quarter she gasped "Thank God!" and wondered would she thank Him by the next. She dreaded each quiver of her lashes that veiled the boy from view, as if the spark of life would vanish as her eyelids fell. When her gaze wavered her own strength failed her, but she was sustained, and felt sustaining, with it bent. At her waist the watch she would not look at ticked, and ticked in wild exaggeration of time's flight. The laggard clock boomed confutation sullenly, dispelling the idea it must have stopped. Hour merged into hour, and he lingered on. Cramped, but unswerving, she could have shrieked her prayer aloud. The dreariness of coming day lightened the blind before the bed; the light grew clearer, and he lingered still. There was the stir of morning; people moved along the street. Dawn touched him with its grayness while he tarried yet. And when at last the sun uprose it found him breathing peacefully once more. And then she knew that Heaven had worked a miracle, and the child would live.

Among the Westport staff that case is cited now, and to-day they tell the tale how Mary Brettan saved a life. The local *Examiner* accorded the matter a third of a column, under the headline of "Heroism by a Hospital Nurse." And, condensed in form, the London press reported it, so that Mr. Collins, of Pattenden's, perused the paragraph—having despatched the youth of the prodigious yawn with a halfpenny—and, remembering why the surname was familiar, wondered a moment what the woman was doing who could never sell their books.

It was later in the morning when Carew entered the building, as Kincaid was crossing the hall. The brightness of the first beams had waxed into a glare, and the nervous pallor of the father's face was streaked with heat. The porter, who remarked it, heard the doctor's answer to his stammered question:

"Your son is out of danger. I am sorry to say Nurse Mary Brettan imperilled her life to benefit him."

Then the two men passed beyond earshot, and what followed the porter did not catch.

To Mary herself Kincaid had spoken little. He was confronted by a recovery impossible to have been conceived, but his predominant emotion was a haunting terror of its cost. She heard of Carew's gratitude from the matron, and received his message of entreaty to be allowed to see her. It was, however, not delivered until after his departure, when she awoke; and by the morrow her instinctive reluctance to an interview had deepened. She chose to content herself with the note he sent: one written to say he *could* not write, that on paper he was unable to shape his words. She read it very slowly, and it drooped to her lap, and she sat contemplating the opposite wall. Presently she smoothed her palms across her eyes, and read the lines again—more slowly, and with her eyes bent closer to the page.

Next day she rose with a strange stiffness in her throat, that increased with her descent into the ward. And she was frightened. But at first she would not

mention it, because she was loath for Kincaid to know. She felt an awkwardness in drawing breath, and by noon it was not to be concealed. She went to bed, protesting, but by Kincaid's command.

Nurse Brettan had become a patient. She said how queer it was to be put into the familiar room in that unfamiliar way. The girl whose watch of Archie she had relieved was deputed to attend on her; and when she was installed the invalid had rallied her weakly on the duty.

"It ought to be a good patient this spell, Sophie. If I'm fractious, you may shake me."

But to Kincaid she spoke more earnestly now the danger-signal was displayed.

"You did all you could to stop me, doctor; whatever happens, you'll remember that. You did everything that was right, and so did I."

"Don't talk rubbish about 'happenings,' nurse!" he had replied; "we shall have you up and at work again directly."

Nevertheless, she had grown worse as the child grew stronger; and for a fortnight the man who loved her suffered fiercer pain each time he told her "rubbish!" And the man she loved sought daily tidings of her when he came to watch the progress of his son. She used to learn of these inquiries, and turn her face round on the pillow when they were repeated to her, and afterwards lie for a long while very quiet. Her distaste to meeting him had quite gone, and she was

sick with a longing to have him come. But now she could not bring herself to do it, because her face and neck were so swollen and unsightly, and her voice had dwindled to a whisper that was not nice to hear. Then at last the hope that she would get better faded altogether, and it was known that she was dying. And one morning the nurse said to her:

"Perhaps to-day you would like to see him? He has asked again."

"To-day?" Momentarily her eyes brightened at the notion, but the shame of her unloveliness came back to her, and she sighed. "Give me—the glass, Sophie—there's a dear!" She looked up at her reflection in the narrow mirror held aslant over the bed. "No," she added feebly, "not to-day—perhaps to-morrow!"

The girl put the glass back slowly in its place, without speaking. And the other's gaze followed her questioningly until she left.

When Kincaid came in, Mary asked him how long she had to live.

He was haggard with a night of agony—a night whose marks all the nurses had observed and wondered at.

"How long?" she queried. "I am dying, doctor, I know." His nostrils quivered, and he clenched his teeth. "Not—it isn't *now?*"

"Oh, don't!" he said. "No, no! You shouldn't—you *mustn't*—frighten yourself like this!"

She was staring at him widely, without moving.

"I am going to die!" she said; "yes, I understand! To-day?"

"Not to-day," he answered hoarsely, "I honestly believe."

"To-morrow?"

"Mary——"

"To-morrow?" she pleaded in the same painful whisper. "Tell the truth! What—to-morrow?"

"I think—to-morrow you may know how much I loved you."

She kept quite still, and he had turned aside. He noticed it was raining, and how the drops spattered on the window-sill.

"I did not see," she murmured; "I didn't see; I thought—you—had—forgotten."

"No," he said; "you never saw. It doesn't matter; I know now it couldn't have been. Hush, dear; don't talk; it's so bad for you!"

"And I am sorry. But I was *his* before you came. I couldn't—could I?"

"No, of course," he said. "Don't worry; don't, for God's sake! There is nothing to be sorry about. I must go to the next ward; I shall see you in the afternoon. Try to sleep a little, won't you?"

He went out, with a word to the woman who reentered, and Mary lay silent for many minutes.

Presently she said:

"Sophie—yes, to-day!"

The nurse glanced over at her quickly.

"All right! he shall hear as soon as he comes."

"Don't forget."

"I won't forget; you can feel quite certain!"

"Thank you, Sophie! I am so tired!"

The rain was falling still. She could hear it blowing against the panes behind her head, and lay listening to it, wondering if it would keep him away. Then her thoughts wandered, and when Kincaid returned she was sleeping. He drew forward the vacant chair, and sat watching her until she stirred. Her eyes opened at him vaguely.

"I've been asleep?"

"Yes."

"Is it late?"

"It's about three," he said, "I think—just three."

"Ah!"

She closed her eyes again, and there was a long pause. He put a hand out, and covered her nerveless fingers with his own.

"Don't mind," she whispered; "it doesn't hurt."

"Oh, my dear, my dear! My mother, and You—and powerless with both!"

"The many," she said faintly, "think of the many you have helped! You have been—very good to me—very good!"

It was the third time since they met that she had told him so; his recompense for devotion—she found him so "good"! And even as she spoke her ear, keener than his, had caught the footfall in the passage for which she had been waiting. And she nestled lower on the pillow, trying to hide her disfigurement from view.

"Mary," said Kincaid, "you didn't care for me; but will you let me kiss you on the forehead, once,—while you know?"

A smile—a smile of tenderness wonderfully new and strange to him—irradiated her face for answer, and, turning, he saw the other man had come in.

THE END.

Opinions of the Press.

"The Man who was Good", by Leonard Merrick.

"Mr. Leonard Merrick is distinguished in the school of fiction to which he belongs. His talent is rare, and what the French mean by fine. . . . . Dr. Kincaid is strongly conceived and drawn, without exaggeration, but with intensity . . . of the power of the writer in portraying the possibilities of human passion the novel is ample evidence."—*Saturday Review.*

"The author has already shown himself an exceptionally acute observer . . . . Mary Brettan is a very woman throughout . . . . . It is in his indication of these extremes of womanly strength and weakness, meeting and alternating with each other in her life, that Mr. Merrick has done his best work. He has contrived by his treatment to give distinction to the hackneyed."—*Athenæum.*

"Has the fascination which comes of some distinction and quality . . . . . Opens with a brilliant, and, we should imagine, a faithful picture . . . . . We are made to sympathise with the heroine. As we follow her experiences in London, we meet with one character who demands especial mention, for he is a creation, and he is undoubtedly humorous. He is a Scotch commercial traveller . . . . . An unconventional novel, marked by rare fidelity to life."—*The Speaker.*

". . . . Here we are allowed a glimpse, and something more than a glimpse, of heights of aspiration and attainment . . . . . With the entrance into the story of Kincaid, we begin to breathe a clearer, sweeter air than that of the drawing-rooms of Maida Vale . . . . . The concluding chapters of the narrative-tragedy are full of power and pathos; and both in conception and treatment 'The man who was Good' is a remarkably strong and interesting novel."—*The Spectator.*

"Those who remember Mr. Merrick's study of Jewish life in "Violet Moses" will not need to be told that he excels in graphic portraiture. This quality is very predominant in 'The Man who

was Good,' though the human types depicted are entirely different from those handled in the previous work."—*Daily Chronicle.*

"Mr. Merrick has a clever way of telling a story. Vivid portraits are drawn of the heroine and the two men who are the chief influences in her life . . . . . Shows the mark of a skilful and practised hand."—*Morning Post.*

"Mr. Merrick's method is realistic, but he can also view life as an idealist . . . . . The character of Mary is truly womanly . . . . . Admirable in their pathos and power, in touches full of insight, and of truth in detail."—*Daily News.*

"Exhibits qualities which entitle it and its author to serious consideration."—*Morning Leader.*

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"Mr. Leonard Merrick is a clever literary workman . . . . . A genuine painter of life."—*Scottish Leader.*

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"The scene on the seashore is admirable . . . . . The situation becomes a remarkable one, and is developed with a keen insight into human nature. This, we feel, is the way such a woman would have acted, and we can pay Mr. Leonard Merrick no higher compliment. He has shown that he possesses a gift rare among English novelists: of developing a complicated and extremely interesting situation according to the methods which governs certain minds under given circumstances."—*Manchester Guardian.*

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